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# A COAT OF MANY COLOURS





*Testa di Moro*

# A Coat of Many Colours

*OCCASIONAL ESSAYS*

By  
HERBERT READ

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# *Contents*

	PAGE
1. THE GREATEST WORK OF ART IN THE WORLD .	1
2. ERIC GILL . . . . .	5
3. KLEE . . . . .	16
4. LAWRENCE OF ARABIA . . . . .	19
5. "THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM" . . .	24
6. ART AND THE PEOPLE . . . . .	27
7. HENRY JAMES . . . . .	31
8. ART AND WAR . . . . .	36
9. GEORGE HERBERT . . . . .	38
10. CÉZANNE . . . . .	40
11. THE "PRELUDE" IN WARTIME . . . .	46
12. BOSCH AND DALI . . . . .	55
13. THE PARADOX OF ANARCHISM . . . .	59
14. HAVELOCK ELLIS . . . . .	67
15. THE FAILURE OF THE WAR BOOKS . . .	72
16. WILLIAM MORRIS . . . . .	76
17. BEN NICHOLSON . . . . .	79
18. ENGLISH PROSE . . . . .	87
19. HENRI ROUSSEAU . . . . .	99
20. THE FACULTY OF ABSTRACTION . . .	104
21. THE LAST OF THE BOHEMIANS. . . .	111
22. ART AND AUTARKY . . . . .	114
23. COLERIDGE . . . . .	115
24. VULGARITY . . . . .	116

# Contents

	PAGE
25. SHELLEY . . . . .	119
26. PROBLEMS OF PRIMITIVE ART . . . . .	128
27. MILTON . . . . .	132
28. SICKERT . . . . .	134
29. FILM ÆSTHETIC . . . . .	139
30. JAMES JOYCE . . . . .	145
31. THE LANGUAGE OF THE EYE . . . . .	149
32. NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE . . . . .	154
33. GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS . . . . .	160
34. THE POETRY AND PROSE OF PAINTING . . . . .	163
35. DOCTOR FAUSTUS . . . . .	166
36. TOULOUSE-LAUTREC . . . . .	177
37. WORDSWORTH'S REMORSE . . . . .	182
38. REALISM AND SUPERREALISM . . . . .	190
39. A FURTHER NOTE ON SUPERREALISM . . . . .	196
40. GEORGE SAINTSBURY . . . . .	199
41. MAX LIEBERMANN . . . . .	202
42. ART AND ETHICS . . . . .	205
43. THE LATER YEARS . . . . .	208
44. SOCIALIST REALISM. . . . .	212
45. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WILLIAM JAMES . . . . .	222
46. THE POET AND THE FILM . . . . .	225
47. THE MESSAGE OF RUSKIN . . . . .	231
48. ETRUSCAN ART . . . . .	237
49. WALTER DE LA MARE . . . . .	239
50. JEAN HÉLION . . . . .	244
51. KIERKEGAARD . . . . .	248

# Contents

	PAGE
52. INDIAN ART . . . . .	259
53. THE ARCHITECT'S PLACE IN A MODERN SOCIETY .	261
54. D. H. LAWRENCE . . . . .	262
55. MODERN CHINESE PAINTING . . . . .	264
56. WALTER BAGEHOT . . . . .	267
57. THE TRIUMPH OF PICASSO . . . . .	273
58. THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION IN AMERICAN FICTION . . . . .	277
59. ROGER FRY . . . . .	282
60. RAPHAEL . . . . .	291
61. T. E. HULME . . . . .	294
62. SEURAT'S "LA BAIGNADE" . . . . .	299
63. STENDHAL . . . . .	305
64. GEORGES ROUAULT . . . . .	308
65. A COMMUNITY OF INDIVIDUALS . . . . .	310
66. PICASSO'S "GUERNICA" . . . . .	317
67. MACHINE ÆSTHETIC . . . . .	320
68. ANDRÉ GIDE . . . . .	324
69. THE DUALITY OF LEONARDO . . . . .	329
70. THE "AREOPAGITICA" . . . . .	333
71. ENVOY . . . . .	346
NOTES . . . . .	350

*Continuer à être étonné ; continuer à être neuf et jusqu'au bout devant ce qui est neuf : car tout est neuf pour qui est neuf. Ne pas céder à l'habitude, qui est usure et usure progressive : et tout devient poussiéreux et gris, tout devient pareil à ce que nous sommes, tout se ressemble et tout se répète, parce que nous nous ressemblons et nous répétons. Il faudrait que l'homme ajoutât à l'enfant sans se déprendre de lui, que l'enfant subsistât au dedans de l'homme, qu'il fût une base où construire par adjonctions successives, mais qui ne la détruiraient pas, comme il arrive. Il ne faut pas être seulement un primitif, mais il faut être aussi un primitif. Rester "premier" en présence des choses premières ; élémentaire devant l'élémentaire ; être capable ainsi de toujours devenir et non pas d'être seulement : non pas immobile, mais en mouvement, au milieu de ce qui est mobile ; en contact incessant avec ce qui se transforme, se transformant soi-même ; livré comme l'enfant totalement à l'extérieur, mais avec ce retour à soi-même que n'a pas l'enfant, et vers un intérieur où on recueille, où on ordonne.*

C. F. RAMUZ : "Pages de Journal",  
*Fontaine*, No. 33 (1944).

## I. *The Greatest Work of Art in the World*

FLORENCE was listless and oppressive in July, 1939, two months before the outbreak of war. We had come over the Apennines from Urbino, a primitive hill-city where we had found the exact magic of Luciano's architecture lying like the geometrical perfection of a crow's egg in its nest of untidy sticks. On the way over we had made a vain effort to see Piero della Francesca's *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolchro, but it was already boarded up, as if waiting for a war. At Arezzo there was a whole festival of Piero's work, and I was confirmed in my preference for this Italian painter, who alone had succeeded in making the difficult marriage between art and science. In very different circumstances, Seurat was to repeat that success.

We went on to Florence in a stilled mood. I myself had exhausted the novelty of its main treasures on previous visits, but to my fellow traveller it was all new. We made a systematic tour of churches and museums, palaces and picture galleries, but whether it was the heat or mere satiation, or some sense of impending doom, for whatever reason I brought to everything a tired, disillusioned eye. Never enamoured of the High Renaissance, it now oppressed me : I felt as if imprisoned in some endless maze of meretricious junk, from which no life, nothing vital or human, was reflected. There is a passage in one of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* which expresses a similar feeling about Rome.

Rome has an oppressive and saddening effect during the first days because of the lifeless and unhealthy atmosphere of museums which it exhales, because of the numberless monuments of the past, which have been hauled out and laboriously restored, and from which a tiny present draws nourishment, and because of the



## A Coat of Many Colours

dreadful over-estimation of these deformed and ruined objects, which is supported by philologists and copied by the conventional Italian tourist, though at bottom they are nothing more than the chance remains of another epoch and of a life which is not, and should not, be ours. Finally, after weeks of daily self-defence, though still a little bewildered, one comes to oneself again and one says, "No, there is no more beauty here than elsewhere, and all these objects, which generation after generation has continued to admire and which the hands of jobbers have repaired and restored, mean nothing, are nothing, and have no heart and no value."

In such a mood, and on the last day of our stay, I decided to re-visit the Museo Archeologico. Pushed into the background of the city, this unpretentious building houses the original art of Etruria, the art which obscurely emerged from the soil and the people of this region. It had thrilled me on my previous visit: would it now penetrate my fit of boredom, or would it too fail me? Well, it did not exactly fail me: those bronzes, so lithe and alert, held my attention far longer than any of the sculptures in the Bargello, or any of the paintings in the Uffizi. I lingered in those cool, straggling rooms, and suddenly any impression the Etruscan bronzes had made on me was obliterated by a small object I had never seen before. It was not more than two or three inches high, and stood among a crowd of small objects, unlabelled and unhonoured, in one of those glass coffins with which museums are always furnished.

It was also a bronze—the head of a negro boy, probably an African slave—and it seemed to shine there like a glow-worm in the darkness of my mood. It was vital: I almost felt, as it fused into my consciousness, that it was alive. What it was—what period and what style—I knew not, and have never troubled to find out. It obviously belongs to that category of vague outlines which we call Græco-Roman, and I like to think it is contemporary with Lucian,

## The Greatest Work of Art in the World

one of those romantic exiles who brought some light and liberty into a proto-fascist world. I believe the artist was, like Lucian, a Greek ; and that it is merely odd that he should anticipate, in his stylistic treatment of the hair, for example, the bronzes and terra-cottas of West Africa—of Benin and Yoruba (not so odd, perhaps, if we remember that Frobenius found striking similarities between the Yoruba and Etruscan cultures and elaborated a theory of direct contact). Whatever he was, and whenever he lived, this artist created something without age or epoch, something so elementally simple and fresh that it had the power, in my sophisticated mind, to rouse the highest pleasure and to prompt—as an aftermath—the deepest questionings.

These questionings were to race riotously in my imagination during the journey back to England, and then to persist through the busy and distracted years that followed. But it would be over-dramatizing the event to give it an apocalyptic significance. As a matter of fact, the little bust had merely jumped into its place as a ready symbol for an attitude which is innate : I have a characteristic preference for the miniature—for the epitome, the episode, the epigram. Rhetoric, everything mouth-filling and pretentious, the imposing and the pompous, everything orotund and ornate, intimidates me, and what is intimidating cannot be lived with. Art must be intimate if it is to be a personal possession. It belongs to a private world.

Here we touch a paradox. I have confessed to an admiration for Piero, whose art we instinctively describe as impersonal, by which we perhaps mean impassive. "He loved impersonality," wrote Bernhard Berenson, "the absence of expressed emotion, as a quality in things," and that is true. It is a rare quality in things and in the representation of things, and perhaps only the Greeks and

## A Coat of Many Colours

the English <sup>1</sup> have possessed it fully. Further, what is impersonal, in my sense of the word, can be heroic. But not heroic in the grand manner, not grandiloquently heroic, in the manner of Rostand. And what is personal can, of course, be spiritual, even transcendental. Romanesque art, and early Gothic art, is personal—the communion of the person with his God. But always a communion in a still, small voice—not the magniloquence of Moses, or of Michelangelo's Moses, or Milton's Satan, or Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

More than once some friend, knowing this predilection of mine, has drawn my attention to the perfect expression which Adalbert Stifter gave to such a philosophy of life (it is more than a theory of art) in his preface to the *Bunten Steinen*. I first came across this passage in Hofmannsthal's *Lesebuch*, and once tried to translate it, without success. It says so well, in German, what I would like to say in English, but I cannot capture its simple tone. When we are dealing with paradoxes, it is better to leave them in the clothing they assume in our own thoughts.

Jesus gave perfect expression to the ethical aspect of this paradox, but here I am only concerned with the æsthetic. What is greatest in art is also at the same time the least. Or rather, there is no "greatness" in art, nor "smallness", for art is an act of creation, and what is created is not created great or small, but given simple existence. What is thus "existential" cannot be measured by any scale we apply to the used and experienced; it cannot have any pragmatic sanction. Beauty is truth; not a measure of truth, nor measured by truth. Truth is beauty, but again, not a measure of beauty, nor measured by beauty. What an object of beauty, or a statement of truth, does to people is another matter, and can be measured

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps one should say the Normans, for in art it is a quality which the English share with the Northern French.

# The Greatest Work of Art in the World

by æsthetical or ethical standards. But these standards change, from age to age, country to country, person to person. Beauty, however, is changeless, and we only fail to perceive this because we invest the work of art with other qualities—we bury it in pomposity, or grandeur, rhetoric and vanity. We inflate art and call it the Grand Manner: but if we are truthful we have to confess that the Grand Manner is really a Gigantic Boredom, that its volume is only maintained by the *pompier*s of culture—schoolmasters, scholars, academicians, encyclopædists, Sunday journalists and cynical politicians.

That is why, if asked to say what is a great work of art, even the greatest work of art in the world, I think of a bronze bust two inches high, which with some difficulty might be found in a case crowded with indifferent objects in the least frequented museum in Florence.

## 2. *Eric Gill*

A FEW days before he died, Eric Gill wrote a letter to me about my pamphlet, *The Philosophy of Anarchism*, in which he said: "I find it difficult to discover anything I don't agree with, and in spite of the appearance to the contrary I am really in complete agreement with you about the necessity of anarchism, the ultimate truth of it, and its immediate practicality as syndicalism."

Any hesitation I might have had in revealing what was a privately expressed opinion was dispelled when I read Gill's *Autobiography*. In this sincere and noble book he makes quite clear that he was fundamentally an anarchist—that he was one of the many people who are anarchists in thought if not yet in name. That was already obvious in an essay on "Ownership and Industrialism" which appeared in his book *Sacred and Secular*,

## A Coat of Many Colours

an essay I would always recommend to people who want a first introduction to the principles of anarchism. But it is in his autobiography that Gill shows not only how he came to be an anarchist, but also how, with an integrity which I for one can only envy, he managed to live like one. As an exceptionally talented craftsman he was, perhaps, in an exceptionally favourable position : he had avoided the capitalist treadmill, and could live more or less where he liked and how he liked. But such freedom did not mean "escapism" for him : he did not retreat to the Côte d'Azur or California, but stayed in the place to which, as he might have said, God had called him. For those who had the privilege of knowing him, his example was an inspiration, his home a friendly light in the darkness. "What I hope above all things is that I have done something towards re-integrating bed and board, the small farm and the workshop, the home and the school, earth and heaven." So he writes towards the end of his autobiography. His whole life was directed to such a "re-integration", and it is his life, and the philosophy upon which it is based, that will endure even longer than his art.

The obituary notices treated Eric Gill chiefly as an artist, but that is not how he thought of himself. As his autobiography shows, his whole life was a protest against the distinction between the artist and the ordinary man. In any decent society, he would say, every man was a special kind of artist—in which case the term lost its significance ; but in the actual society in which we live, the man who calls himself artist is a false pretender of some sort—if he does not impose on other people, he imposes on himself. From the very beginning of his career Gill was determined to be honest with himself, and it is that determination which gives to his book the sincerity and significance of a *Pilgrim's Progress*. At the end he

## Eric Gill

sums up in one paragraph what had been the aim of his life. Lettering, type-designing, engraving, stone-carving, drawing—these activities which had brought him fame were so many by-products of his real activity, which was “to make a cell of good living in the chaos of our world”. Every step in his life was governed by that aim. He gave up architecture and took up the more modest craft of lettering because it seemed more compatible with a good way of life; he left London and helped to found an ideal community at Ditchling, and when the life at Ditchling was spoilt by unwelcome publicity, he went into the wilds of Wales. When life in Wales became too difficult, he came to Buckinghamshire and found what he wanted—a quadrangle of decent English brick buildings—“the only decent way to live”—and there he stayed until he died.

It was not merely his way of life that was determined by this rational aim, but also what other people would call his opinions, which were actually aspects of an integral religion, embracing the whole of life. He has been called an eccentric, but in the usual meaning of the word, no man was ever less an eccentric. He was a rationalist. He began by discovering that fine lettering was rational lettering—exactly the opposite of “fancy” lettering—“and that was the new idea, the explosive notion, and, you might say, the *secret*”. Having thus discovered a reasonable basis for lettering, the next thing was to discover a reasonable workshop life, a reasonable life for workmen. That led him, as a first stage, to socialism, but not to the socialism of politicians and bureaucrats. Socialism as a political movement is, he soon discovered, “hardly more than an attempt to re-order the distribution of factory products and factory profits”. It did not tackle the evil at its root—the love of money—and there could be no hope for the revival of either good life or good work “until double-entry book-keeping is abandoned by all the

## A Coat of Many Colours

producing and the distributing trades". It became clear to him that "the hateful world of the man of business and its hateful cruelties would never be abolished by those who profited by them", and he gradually abandoned all hope of reform by parliamentary means. He began to realize that the essential evil arose somewhere in the sphere of religion. If men were really conscious of God, then these evils could not exist. To a man conscious of God it should be "incomparably more horrible that men of business should rule us and impose their foul point of view on the world than it would be if the whole race of men and women should rot their bodies with lechery and drunkenness". So Gill returned to the worship of God, and his rationalism guided him to the only Church which can claim to be universal. His difficulties did not end there, for once within the Church he became a fierce critic of the timidity and hypocrisy of his fellow-Christians. There were honourable exceptions—"The Popes themselves have condemned modern capitalism and many of the clergy have followed their example. But Christians in general, including Catholics in general, have quite notoriously not followed the Popes in this matter."

My socialism was from the beginning [Gill wrote] a revolt against the intellectual degradation of the factory hands and the damned ugliness of all that capitalist-industrialism produced, and it was not primarily a revolt against the cruelty and injustice of the possessing classes or against the misery of the poor. It was not so much the working *class* that concerned me as the working *man*—not so much what he got *from* working as what he did *by* working.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Throughout Gill's social philosophy there is an equivocation in his use of the word "work". "It was the peculiar achievement of the nineteenth century", he wrote in *Art and a Changing Civilization*, "to separate, in thought and in practice, the idea of work from the idea of art, the activity of the 'workman' from the activity of the 'artist', and to make the artist a special

## Eric Gill

This shows the early direction of Gill's political ideas : he was what I have been accustomed to call an individualist, but in the letter already referred to, he wrote :

I think it would be good if you distinguished between the *individual*, as being the unit of a group whether of animate or inanimate nature, and the *person*. It is a primary doctrine of Christianity that men are unique persons. It is as persons that they are unique, whereas as individuals they may not be.

It is a distinction which I accept—it is, indeed, a distinction fundamental to anarchism, and the basic reason

person, removed from and exalted above the common ruck of beings, a sort of priest, the expert in a mystery, a mystery not of craft or trade unionism but of spiritual remoteness." But there is a sense in which the idea of work should be separated from the idea of art. Work is really of two distinct kinds. The child who said : " First I think and then I draw my think " was wiser than Mr. Gill perceives ; because the child first thought, first " prefigured " the thing to be drawn. The maker of standard architectural mouldings, or even of standard bricks, no doubt has an image of some kind in his mind before he begins to make the moulding or the brick, but it would not be right to dignify this image by the name of thought, nor the moulding or brick (however well made) by the name of art. Indeed, tending a machine for making bricks is surely a job demanding more intelligence and even more " art " than making bricks by hand. Such work, and indeed the great mass of work, is better done by machines. What the machine cannot do is the " thinking " part, and what distinguishes the artist from the workman is the ability to " think ", a certain faculty which the Germans call *Gestaltungsfähigkeit*, but which we, for want of a single word, might call the faculty of plastic configuration—the ability to " think " in plastic images. This is not a normal faculty, but the possession of those abnormal people we call artists. Unless we are clear on that point, we shall never be clear on the most pressing of problems connected with art in the twentieth century—the place of the artist in the machine age. Because his philosophy saw no function for the artist in the machine age, Gill, like Gandhi, was compelled to renounce the whole basis of modern civilization. There may be other grounds for rejecting the machine—economic grounds, for example—but it is quite clear to me that the machine does not necessarily exclude the artist.



## A Coat of Many Colours

for our rejection of all forms of collectivism and state capitalism. When Gill first entered the socialist movement, through the Fabian Society, he found that no one respected this distinction—the socialist movement

was not moved or led, still less could it be said to be inspired, by any ideas of man or of man's life or of man's work other than those of the capitalist world against whose injustices and cruelties it was in revolt. . . . Socialism as a political movement is hardly more than an attempt to re-order the distribution of factory products and factory profits.

Gill then concluded that "no merely political or economic rearrangement of the world was going to be effective to remove such horrors"—the horrors of capitalist society. The remedy, he felt, must lie in the sphere of religion and morals. The root of the social evil was a moral evil—the desire of money—and to Gill it was elementary that all Christians should condemn this evil, or give up pretending to be followers of Christ. He resolved to keep clear of politics and politicians: he could not believe that political arrangements and re-arrangements were real. To him it was all a confused business of ramps and rackets—"pretended quarrels and dishonest commercial schemings, having no relation to the real interests of peoples, neither to their spiritual nor their material welfare, and conducted upon no principles other than momentary self-interest".

In Gill's sense of the word, all anarchists are resolved to keep clear of politics. But politics in another sense—the politics of preaching and propaganda—of thought and of work—the politics which consist of trying "to make a cell of good living in the chaos of our world"—to such politics we must devote ourselves, and such are the politics which Gill practised with greater effect than he ever realized. He belonged to that rare company of *integral*

## Eric Gill

socialists, whose lives are a consequence of their socialism, their socialism a consequence of their lives.

That rare company consists of all those people to whom it is evident that the evils of what is called totalitarianism—and the same evil is also called National Socialism, Fascism, and Bolshevism—can only be avoided or ended by a change of heart. And “change of heart” is too polite a phrase for what must be a spiritual and mental revolution in mankind. It is natural that those people who are honest Christians, like Eric Gill, should regard the Church as the appropriate agent for this spiritual reform. Most of the people with whom I discuss these fundamental questions take this view, and the more sincere such people are, the more they are driven to demand of the Church what is in effect a new Reformation.

On the fundamental issue I agree with these people—a change of heart is necessary. I disagree with them because I cannot believe in a second reformation that would enable the Christian Churches to become the effective agents of such a change. Let us consider what it would imply: first, the reunion of the Churches, for there can be no effective action on a universal scale without unity. Secondly, the abandonment of all worldly power and a complete identity with the cause of the poor and oppressed. Thirdly, the abandonment of the medieval dogmas to which most of the Churches still cling, and the adoption of a new morality more in accordance with the permanent changes which three centuries of scientific discovery have wrought in man’s conception of the universe and human destiny. Those are only three essentials of a New Reformation, but I do not think I am unduly pessimistic in regarding them as insuperable difficulties. Before these difficulties could be resolved the structure of the Churches as we know them now would have been entirely obliterated. I do not say that Christianity would

## A Coat of Many Colours

have been obliterated ; indeed, I am saying that as the religion of love and brotherhood it must still pursue its revolutionary course in history. But it is obvious—and this was also the final conclusion of that profoundest of modern Christians, Søren Kierkegaard—that before Christianity can become a religion of love and brotherhood, the Churches as we know them now will have to disappear. In a word, Christianity and the Church are incommensurable.

There is little likelihood that the world will be saved by a return of heretics to the Church. As a cell of good living the Church simply does not exist. It is because I cannot see salvation in this direction that I put my faith in a change of heart which is pagan or secular in its agency. Perhaps in some distant age anarchism and Christianity will come together again, as they were together in the early days of the Church. It will be said that such a supposition makes anarchism just as remote a contingency as a Christian community. I agree. Both are ideals, and both are in no sense immediately realizable. It is a choice between one ideal which is theistic and has a supernatural background, and another ideal which is humanistic and has a background of reason and natural law. In the existing state of opinion, more people will be found, or could be found, to follow Nature (and all that that word implies) than to follow God (and all that that word implies). That fundamentally they imply the same end is the only dogma which personally I find it necessary to accept.

To follow Nature—that is a vague phrase which needs more definition, though its meaning is relatively simple. The most common kind of association which the word has is probably “nature red in tooth and claw” ; and this is balanced by the more optimistic phrase, “the beauties of nature”, by which, however, is still meant

## Eric Gill

something essentially wild and uncultivated. But that is not the meaning which we attach to nature in the phrase "the laws of nature", and it is to nature in this biological or scientific sense that I refer. For underlying the apparent riotousness of nature, its luxuriance, and the violent changes which pass over its face like a fever, are certain universal laws—a formal structure of matter and a calculable behaviour of energy.<sup>1</sup>

To illustrate my meaning I would like to quote a parable from the writings of the Chinese philosopher, Chuang Tze :

Horses have hoofs to carry them over frost and snow ; hair, to protect them from wind and cold. They eat grass and drink water, and fling up their heels over the champaign. Such is the real nature of horses. Palatial dwellings are of no use to them.

One day Poh Loh appeared, saying : " I understand the management of horses,"

So he branded them and clipped them and pared their hoofs, and put halters on them, tying them up by the head and shackling them by the feet, disposing them in stables, with the result that two or three in every ten died. Then he kept them hungry and thirsty, trotting them and galloping them, and grooming, and trimming, with the misery of the tasselled bridle before and the fear of the knotted whip behind, until more than half of them were dead. . . . Nevertheless, every age extols Poh Loh for his skill in managing horses. . . . Those who *govern* the empire make the same mistake.

Now I regard government of the empire from quite a different point of view.

The people have certain natural instincts :—to weave and clothe themselves, to till and feed themselves. These are common to all humanity, and all are agreed thereon. Such instincts are called "Heaven-sent".

And so in the days when natural instincts prevailed,

<sup>1</sup> " Il y a un ordre contre lequel il est vain de lutter. On doit obéir à la loi des mondes qui dirigent de la même main le roulement de Betelgeuse et le tremblement de la semence des hommes. Le social ne doit être que le naturel."

—JEAN GIONO : *Les Vraies Richesses*.

## A Coat of Many Colours

men moved quietly and gazed steadily. At that time, there were no roads over mountains, nor boats, nor bridges over water. All things were produced, each for its own proper sphere. Birds and beasts multiplied; trees and shrubs grew up. The former might be led by the hand; you could climb up and peep into the raven's nest. For then man dwelt with birds and beasts, and all creation was one. There were no distinctions of good and bad men. Being all equally without knowledge, their virtue could not go astray. Being all equally without evil desires, they were in a state of natural integrity, the perfection of human existence.

But when sages appeared, tripping people over charity and fettering with duty to one's neighbour, doubt found its way into the world. And then with their gushing over music and fussing over ceremony, the empire became divided against itself. . . .

Horses live on dry land, eat grass and drink water. When pleased, they rub their necks together. When angry, they turn round and kick their heels at each other. Thus far only do their natural dispositions carry them. But bridled and bitted, with a plate of metal on their foreheads, they learn to cast vicious looks, to turn the head, to bite, to resist, to get the bit out of the mouth or the bridle into it. And thus their natures become depraved—the fault of Poh Loh.

In the days of Ho Hsü the people did nothing in particular when at rest, and went nowhere in particular when they moved. Having food, they rejoiced; having full bellies, they strolled about. Such were the capacities of the people. But when the sages came to worry them with ceremonies and music in order to rectify the form of government, and dangled charity and duty to one's neighbour before them in order to satisfy their hearts,—then the people began to develop a taste for knowledge and to struggle one with the other in their desire for gain. This was the error of the sages.<sup>1</sup>

What Chuang Tze opposes to all those people who demand a programme for reforming the world is a doctrine of inaction. In other words we should seek the natural

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Herbert A. Giles (*Chuang Tzŭ*, London, Quaritch, 1889).

## Eric Gill

conditions of existence, and this brings us back to Gill's phrase—"to make a cell of good living in the chaos of the world". Only a cell—a microscopic unit in the immensity of the world: but the world is made up of such units and upon the health of each individual cell depends the health of society.

I do not suggest that the reader should emulate the Chinese mystic and "sit like a corpse while his dragon-power is manifested around". What I wish to suggest is that the man who adapts himself to natural conditions of existence will have a principle by means of which he can give an answer to most of the problems of life. I will only give one example, but it is very practical and very immediate. We know the general history of the trade unions—how they began some hundred years ago as associations of workmen whose object was to agitate for certain specific social and economic reforms. We know how they slowly acquired legal and political rights and became established over the whole industrial world. This growth was rather haphazard and embodied a contradiction which has never been resolved, and which at any time in the immediate future might become the dominant question of the day—the question whether the unions should be organized according to craft, so that all engineers, in whatever industry employed, should be in one union, and look after the rights of engineers; or whether the unions should be organized according to industry, so that all the workers engaged on the production of a particular object or commodity should be in one union, and look after the rights of that industry. Socialists and trade unionists the world over are divided on this question, but for the anarchist there can be no question. The end must determine the means. Men must be united by the natural conditions of work. There is little in common between the conditions of an engineer in a shipbuilding yard in

## A Coat of Many Colours

Glasgow and an engineer in a motor-works in Oxford. But the engineer in the shipbuilding yard is in daily contact with the carpenter and the draughtsman and a thousand other people engaged in a common task—the building of a ship. They work together and live together, and together they should be at liberty to create those workshop conditions which make a cell of good living in the chaos of the world. So the anarchist favours industrial unions and regional collectives and feels certain that their creation would bring the world a step nearer to the perfection of the natural law.

Anarchism, therefore, is a philosophy, not a system of politics ; but once its principles have been accepted, they can be applied at any point. Anarchism does not rely on plans, which are rational constructions that tend to leave out the imponderable and elusive factors of human feeling and human instinct. There is only one plan—the plan of nature. We must live according to natural laws, and by virtue of the power which comes from concentrating upon their manifestation in the individual human mind. Anarchism asserts—it is its only assertion—that life must be so ordered that the individual can live a natural life, “attending to what is within”. But once we begin to work out the implications of this principle, we shall not end until we have abolished the state. For if people began to live by natural laws, there would be so little need for man-made laws, and no need at all for a complex machinery of government to enforce such laws.

### 3. *Klee*

PAUL KLEE's death in 1940 was almost unnoticed amid the din of war. It was a war that fell like a gradually darkening screen over the art of the between-war years.

## Paul Klee

When that screen has lifted again, we hope that it will reveal a stage transformed beyond all recognition. Some of the players may be the same, but they will be wearing different costumes, and living in a different atmosphere, and behaving in an altogether different way. Only one thing will have survived from the wicked past—Cinderella's glass-slippers, the infinitely precious symbol of the beauty and truth whose crystal brightness no catastrophe can destroy.

I believe that the art of Paul Klee is part of that crystal brightness. He lived in our kitchen-midden world, with strife and despair all around him. But like William Blake, to whom he was temperamentally akin, he lived with the immunity of a mystic. That does not mean that his art had no relation to the world about him—that he was, as we inelegantly say, an "escapist". It is only an unintelligent and superficial realism that demands of the artist a mechanical reflection of the objects which lie in his field of vision. Nor is it much more intelligent to restrict the artist to what is called an interpretation of those objects—the running commentary of the impressionistic journalist. What history demands in its long run, is the object itself—the work of art which is itself a created reality, an addition to the sum of real objects in the world. Such objects can only come from the artist's own world, the unique world of his own subjective existence. That, of course, is not a vacuum—it is the most crowded receptacle in the universe, and psychology has never plumbed its depths. It is deep enough, at any rate, to contain, not only all that the senses can drain into it, but much else that wells up from hidden springs. It is out of this horn of plenty that the artist must snatch his objects, with nothing but his sensibility to guide him.

His sensibility ! There you have the keyword, however we define it, in Klee's case or in the case of any great



## A Coat of Many Colours

artist. The sensibility—perhaps sensitivity is a more precise word—of Klee was infallible, and from the beginning expressed in that most sensitive of plastic media, the line (here again, Blake comes into comparison). His earliest drawings and engravings were influenced by Aubrey Beardsley's work—he comes directly out of that tradition of precise fantasy. But he could never have remained in a world of artifice and literary inspiration. He escaped by way of nature, and there is a whole phase of his work—round about 1908-12—which might be described as impressionistic. But he knew the truth of that saying of Meister Eckhart: "If you seek the kernel, then you must break the shell. And likewise if you would know the reality of Nature, you must destroy the appearance, and the farther you go beyond the appearance, the nearer you will be to the essence." Thereafter every painting by Klee becomes an attempt to express this inner essence. But it is just at this point that he miraculously avoids the pitfall of almost all artists who seek to express the meta-physical. He does not for a moment surrender his artistic integrity—his sensibility. He knows that he has to bear witness, not with the tongue, which is the instrument of ideas or conceptions, but with his pen and brush, the instruments of his perception and imagination. He never falters. He feels the limitations of his instruments, but he does not abandon them: he strives to perfect them, to give them greater precision and subtlety. He explores the world of colour, he co-ordinates it with his sensitive line, and creates the subtlest counterpoint that the plastic arts have ever known. In this experiment he is greatly aided by his musical sensibility—he was born into a musical family and was himself a fine violinist. It is not merely a question of analogy. Many of Klee's paintings are translations or transformations of musical images; or rather, he uses his feeling for melody and harmony to

## Paul Klee

co-ordinate his line and colour. It is not a confusion of the arts ; it is the creation of a new art which is a unity of painting and music.

This art, we must admit, has one limitation. Its scale is miniature. It is the lyric, not the epic. It is Chopin, not Wagner. Personally, I am against the grandiose in art. If it does not merely bore me, it intimidates me. I do not believe it is necessary. The greatest truth was ever spoken in a still small voice. The great mystics are not long-winded. Great poetry is not sustained beyond a page or two of print. The greatest painting can be contained within a square foot of canvas. The greatest is never the grandiose.

Klee must have died unhappy, for his painting had been banned in the country which he had honoured with his presence for the most active part of his life. But I am sure he did not despair. I am reminded of an entry in his diary, dated June 1905. He describes how in his search for a full comprehension of all the technical possibilities of his art, he one day tried scratching a blackened sheet of glass with a needle. "The medium", he writes, "was no longer the black line, but the white. White energy against a nocturnal background beautifully illustrates the saying : Let there be light."

The whole of Klee's life-work was a white energy against the dark background of modern Germany.

### 4. *Lawrence of Arabia*

"FAME is the focus of all the misunderstandings which gather about a new name." This was said by Rilke of Rodin, but it applies with peculiar force to T. E. Lawrence. No great figure of our time has been so misunderstood ; and the more the misunderstanding grew, the more famous

## A Coat of Many Colours

he became, until it was suspected that he had a perverse genius for publicity. Now for the first time we can discover the truth about his strange personality. Before the war, as his early letters show, Lawrence was "an ordinary archæologist", and but for the war would have remained an archæologist, completely unknown to the man in the street. He had a modest ambition to run a private printing press; and there are signs of that self-dissatisfaction which was later to become pathological. But no determined ambition; no stirrings of a social conscience, of an idealistic mission, or any of the feelings which prompt men to exceptional actions. When the war came, he did not respond in any dramatic way; he went into the War Office and helped to draw maps. In due course he was sent out to Egypt, still in the map department. But between Egypt and the scene of war there were vast stretches of country about which Lawrence knew as much as any man. He not only knew the terrain, but in his archæological expeditions he had observed the inhabitants and grown sympathetic towards them. He had intelligence—rather more intelligence than the average Staff officer—and he conceived a plan. The course of the war made his plan not only feasible, but imperative. He was entrusted with the organization of a revolt among the Arab tribes, and not only succeeded in persuading the Arabs to unite in a Holy War against their Turkish oppressors, but led them in a series of brilliant manœuvres.

He did no more than a score, perhaps a hundred, other officers who conducted campaigns or strategic operations during the war. But the scene was Arabia, and Arabia is a glamorous word. And guerrilla warfare is a comparatively romantic occupation, in the eyes of the newspaper public. After four years of grim hysteria, the newspapers were very much in need of romance. In this mood they discovered Lawrence and made him a mob

## Lawrence of Arabia

hero. In 1919 an American lecturer, Lowell Thomas, sprang into the limelight with Lawrence of Arabia as his theme. Only the Albert Hall was big enough for his audiences : he drew over a million people in this country alone. The legend was established, and, like all legends, improved with time.

Meanwhile the ex-archæologist was immersed in the dirty game of international politics, as played at Versailles—a game from which he retired disillusioned and for the moment defeated. He and the Arabs whom he had led, and to whom he had pledged British honour, were betrayed. He felt, therefore, that he had no further place in the imperial scheme. He returned to his home in Oxford and “would sometimes sit the entire morning between breakfast and lunch in the same position, without moving, and with the same expression on his face”. He had already begun to write the history of his war experiences which he called *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

A revision of the Middle Eastern position was soon seen to be inevitable and Lawrence was eventually called to the Colonial Office by Winston Churchill to advise on a new settlement. His advice was to a considerable extent adopted and by the end of 1922 Lawrence felt that “England was out of the Arab affair with clean hands”. He himself, like a tired lion, could retire from an arena which he had never willingly entered to lick his sixty wounds.

Here comes the crux of his career, and the deepest cause of mystification. At this point Lawrence could have chosen almost any position of leadership in English life : he could have chosen *the* position of leadership, the leadership of the war generation. But that is assuming he was the stuff of which leaders are made. Instead he immured himself in what he thought was the nearest modern equivalent to a monastery of the Middle Ages ; he became a private in the Air Force.

## A Coat of Many Colours

There are many explanations of this strange action, including his own. He himself said, in the most intimate confession he ever made (his letters to Lionel Curtis) that "self-degradation" was his aim. "I haven't the impulse and the conviction to fit what I know to be my power of moulding men and things : and so I always regret what I've created, when the leisure after creation lets me look back and see that the idea was second-hand."

The most superficial view attributes this feeling of fatuity to the privations and sufferings of the war years, and to the serious air crash he experienced in 1919. Alternatively, it is suggested that the bitter disillusionment of the Peace Conference "warped" his mind. But it is to be doubted whether, on any profound interpretation of the word "mind", consciously experienced events of this kind have any effect. In other words, the warp is in the make of the man, and he can only become what he *is*—is by birth and breeding. Happiness, on this assumption, can only come to a man who lives along his grain—who drees his own weird ; which is the conclusion Lawrence came to :

. . . perhaps in determinism complete there lies the perfect peace I have so longed for. Free-will I've tried, and rejected : authority I've rejected (not obedience, for that is my present effort, to find equality only in subordination. It is dominion whose taste I have been cloyed with) : action I've rejected : and the intellectual life : and receptive senses : and the battle of wits. They were all failures, and my reason tells me therefore that obedience, nescience, will also fail, since the roots of common failure must lie in myself—and yet in spite of reason I am trying it.

Such is Lawrence's own explanation of himself. His nature was (he uses the ugly word himself) masochistic ; a psychological state of which we find, not only the overt symptoms, but also the secondary characteristics. Every-

## Lawrence of Arabia

thing in his life fits the interpretation. A frigidity towards women was balanced by an impulse towards art. "Artists excite and attract me, seduce me, from what I am." He was not an artist by nature, but had a sick longing to be one. The *Seven Pillars* is a straining after this æsthetic grace, and is an artificial monstrosity, as he himself so freely and so repeatedly admitted. Masochism explains, too, his disinclination to rebel. Perfect pessimism, such as his, implies acquiescence in the immediate. He saw through the pretence of our social system. "All the subject provinces of the Empire to me were not worth one dead English boy." But the governors of these same provinces were his friends and associates, and he would not come out against them. "The ideals of a policy are entrancing, heady things: the translating them into terms of compromise with the social structure as it has evolved is pretty second-rate work. . . . A decent nihilism is what I hope for, generally."

What remains? Something very precious. Not, as some would claim for the *Seven Pillars*, a great masterpiece of literature (and as one who has read *The Mint* I would advise no one to have great expectations of that odd document); not a final achievement in politics (everything is still in the melting-pot); but simply this revelation of a man. His letters are a great confession—like the letters of his namesake, D. H. Lawrence, like Van Gogh's letters. The very depth and sincerity of the confession were imposed on Lawrence by the conflict between his fate and his personality: the personality did not match the fate that was being imposed on it; and so he was forced into the bleak agony of explanation, and endless expiation.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 5. “*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*”

THE *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a difficult book. Not difficult to read, in the ordinary sense, but difficult to bring into any definite focus. So much of it is vivid, but the author's mind behind it all is dark, and obscured by divided aims. It is this core of darkness which more than anything else puts one in doubt as to the essential greatness of the book. Great books are written in moods of spiritual light and intellectual certainty, and out of any other mood there only emerges an imperfect work of art. It might be less uncompromising to say that out of any other mood there only emerges a *romantic* work of art, but about the best romantic moods, moods held openly and consistently, there is a positiveness which relieves them from the charge of darkness and doubt. I do not, however, see this openness in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

The story of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is splendid “copy”, but is it anything more? If it is, it is so by virtue either of its matter or its manner. By virtue of its matter, because if a story is of epic quality it will transcend its manner, passing from one story-teller to another until it perhaps receives that most immortal manner—the anonymous tradition. But in the present case we begin with a doubt—who is the hero of the story: Colonel Lawrence or the Arabian Army? If Colonel Lawrence, then the story fails to reach epic quality because Colonel Lawrence, however brave and courageous he may have been, is not heroic. About the epic hero there is an essential undoubting directness: his aim is single and unswerving; he questions neither himself, his aims, nor his destiny. He may share his glory with his chosen band, his *comitatus*, but essentially he is self-possessed, self-reliant, arrogant and unintelligent. Colonel Lawrence was none of these

## “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom”

things ; in all these things he was at the contrary pole—full of doubts and dissemblings, uncertain of his aim, his pride eaten into by humility and remorse, his conduct actuated by vague and eccentric motives. It is no disparagement to say that out of such stuff no hero is made. Out of such stuff we only get a case of conscience, a problem of personality. Such problems, though of profound interest to the contemporaries and co-sufferers of a man, tend to dissolve with the circumstances which produced them. They are only saved from such a fate by their universal elements, as when the personality of Hamlet stands for the general mood of the Renaissance, or, in a lesser degree, as when Rousseau seems to embody the spirit of an epoch. But even Rousseau is a pathological case rather than a hero, inciting our curiosity rather than arousing our admiration.

To this limited extent Colonel Lawrence is representative : a lame duck in an age of lame ducks ; a soldier spoilt by introspection and self-analysis ; a man with a load on his mind.

But if Colonel Lawrence is not the “hero” of this epic, can we discern one in the Arab nation? Surely not. We learn from this book, as from *Arabia Deserta*, that the Arabs have qualities which we can admire, such as a capacity for hardship and endurance : the possibilities, at least, of fine perceptions ; and a real religious force. But these qualities cannot for long blind us to the overwhelming venality, pettiness, fanaticism and ignorance of the mass of them. This realization is present in Colonel Lawrence’s own mind, and acts as a blight on whatever there is of epic quality in that fine effort of strategy and cunning which culminated in the fall of Damascus. But let us realize this fact, too : the Palestine Campaign was merely the romantic fringe of the war. In France and Belgium men of infinitely finer quality than these Arabs



## A Coat of Many Colours

were enduring day after day, without the inspiration of the open horizon and all that that conveys of adventure and surprise, the dull and dispiriting agony of trench warfare. No one will be fool enough to make out of that horror an epic story, or to see in our armies a race of self-reliant heroes ; but this Arabian adventure was no more than a dance of flies in the air beside the magnitude of that terrific earthy conflict. To see one of these adventurers, then, "get away with" the heroic buncombe in a literary press mostly in the hands of non-combatants, inspired a contemporary like myself with a certain bitterness of which I ought perhaps to have been ashamed, but which at any rate I was not ashamed to confess.

Perhaps this is all beside the point. I can still read *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* with keen interest, and what more can man want ? Nothing, if you will leave it at that. But if I am expected to pay the book the lip service I willingly pay to *Arabia Deserta*, then I revolt. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is not in the same category. Doughty fills me with wonder, with reverence, and gives me unfailing enjoyment. "Who touches this book touches a man"—and at every page : a man who was a great mind, a great patriarch among men, a great enduring character, pensive but self-possessed, inquiring but full of certainty. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* I am only conscious of an uneasy adventurer ; of an Oxford graduate with a civilian and supercilious lack of the sense of discipline ; of a mind, not great with thought, but tortured by some restless spirit that drives it out into the desert, to physical folly and self-immolation, a spirit that never triumphs over the body and never attains peace.

# Art and the People

## 6. *Art and the People*

RUSKIN, who is still the wisest philosopher to whom we can turn for the truth about this subject, once said that a work of art, in addition to *looking* well, must also *speak* well and *act* well. These homely words express in a phrase the threefold nature of an activity which is usually discussed as if it had only a single nature. Critics who emphasize the need of art to look well, and neglect its other aspects, are called æsthetes, and since Oscar Wilde's time (for he was a typical representative of this attitude) they have been out of fashion. Nevertheless, they expressed a third of the truth about art.

People who emphasize the need of art to speak well are usually moralists of some kind. Their greatest representative was Tolstoy, but with a different morality in mind, they have more recently been represented by the "socialist-realists" in Russia, who believe that the function of art is primarily to further the cause of socialism. Art, for such people, is merely an effective way of saying or illustrating some idea (a religious or political ideology), and the importance of art, therefore, corresponds to the importance of its message.

The third set of people believe that art is primarily a way of making or doing something useful, and that its value corresponds to its functional efficiency. Good architecture, they say, is found wherever you have a building which is fit for its purpose—strong, convenient and commodious. They go so far as to say that when the work of man has these qualities, the other aspects of a work of art are automatically present—that what works well, looks well and speaks well.

We may regard these as the three tests of a work of art, but it is not equally easy to apply them all. Whether

## A Coat of Many Colours

a building, for example, works well can be determined by use : but it is not so easy to agree that a painting or a piece of sculpture "acts" well. We all think that we know when a building or a picture "looks" well, but we admit that it is a matter of *taste*, and we say that one man's meat is another man's poison. Even scientifically it can be shown that the reactions of different people to the same work of art vary according to their temperamental disposition, which in its turn is due to complex factors like heredity, environment, even the functioning of the individual's glands. The only way out of this difficulty is to say that the visual qualities of art are *absolute*, that is to say, that they depend on the possession of beauty, which is not a question of individual judgement, but the effect of certain natural laws—that the question whether a thing is beautiful or not (and it does not matter whether it is a flower, a face, a painting or a building) is determined by its possession of certain harmonious proportions, which are present in nature, and which are imitated in works of art.

But if we can solve this difficulty by an appeal to "laws of nature", what are we to do about the question whether a work of art speaks well? This is the trickiest problem of all, and even a very great man like Tolstoy did not reach a satisfactory solution. Tolstoy said that a work of art is only good when a man expresses sound feeling (or when he is perfectly sincere), but that involved a definition of soundness as well as of feeling—when is a feeling "sound"? Tolstoy replied: "Only when a man is living a life in all respects natural and proper to man", but that does not get us much farther, because we cannot agree on what sort of life is in all respects natural and proper to man. Tolstoy's ideal was simplicity, and therefore he condemned the art of Beethoven and Wagner, the poetry of Baudelaire, the drama of Ibsen, the paintings of

## Art and the People

the Impressionists. He didn't think much of Shakespeare. It was all upper-class art—the art of an artificial society. Worse still, it was essentially secular art—art without uplift. “Universal art (the art he contrasted with all this decadent art) has a definite and indubitable internal criterion—religious perception ; upper-class art lacks this, and therefore the appreciators of that art are obliged to cling to some external criterion.” Therefore Tolstoy was bitterly opposed to æsthetics, which he regarded as a false science. He did not see, or was not willing to admit, that the canons of beauty are derived from nature. Beauty, as a matter of fact, was a word he avoided, and he obstinately denied that there could be any objective definition of such a term. He ignored Plato's philosophy of beauty, and the æsthetics of Plato's medieval followers, which is the basis of the “natural” theory of art.

Tolstoy was right in supposing that the kind of art a people gets is determined by their social organization : the Marxists are also right in putting forward what is essentially the same theory, although disguised in a lot of their ideological jargon. But it is a simple logical error, committed by both philosophies, to imagine that the art which corresponds to their particular social ideal is the best kind of art or the only kind of art. It is an error which arises from concentrating entirely on one of the three aspects of art. Similar errors arise from an exclusive devotion to the other two aspects—the æsthetic error (art for art's sake) and the functional error (“the house is a machine to live in”, etc.). The complete work of art expresses at one and the same time all three functions—it speaks, acts and looks well. But when it is complete in this sense, has it general qualities upon which we could base a more precise definition ? I believe that the answer is No—that the more precise we become about art, the more we have to particularize.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Nevertheless, we can venture a few generalizations. We can say that art is a language, a medium of communication. Both Wordsworth and Tolstoy defined it in this sense and in almost identical terms. "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others express the same feeling—that is the activity of art" (Tolstoy). But the trouble about such a definition is that it uses another undefined term—in this case the word "feeling". When it comes to the point, Tolstoy wants to censor the artist's feelings, and he is back again to his social or political prejudices. I think it will be found that the only universal quality in art is beauty, but we must be careful to admit that this is a purely formal quality and in no sense a moral one. It is this quality in art which causes it to outlast the social systems and religious motives in whose service it originated. On this aspect of the question the great historian Jakob Burckhardt has written the final words: "From the world, from time and nature, art and poetry draw images, eternally valid and universally intelligible, the only perdurable thing on earth, a second, ideal creation, exempt from the limitations of individual temporality, an earthly immortality, a language for all the nations." This does not mean that we must neglect the ideological and functional aspects of art: these are, indeed, the essential stimuli without which no art will come into being. But as Burckhardt also said: "Art bound down to facts, still more to thoughts, is lost." Alas, that so many theorists, especially on the political left, should now be busy binding art down either to thoughts or to facts!

# Henry James

## 7. *Henry James*

IN one of his letters Henry James contemplated a volume which would unite all the prefaces which he wrote for the definitive New York Edition of his works. "They ought, collected together . . . to form a sort of comprehensive manual or *vade mecum* for aspirants in our arduous profession. Still, it will be a long time before I shall want to collect them together for that purpose and furnish *them* with a final Preface." He was fated never to do so, but twenty years after his death it was done for him by a young American critic.<sup>1</sup>

As the story of a story, each preface has its dramatic interest and those who have not read the stories in the light of each preface have missed half the enjoyment to be got from them. The recognition of the germ of a story—in some casual encounter, some dinner-table anecdote, some observed incident; the growth of the germ in the warmth of the imagination; its attraction to itself of sidelights and reflections; its miraculous expansion into the very stuff of life, quickened with emotion, vital, vivid—all this makes the dramatic interest of a type of narrative unique in the history of literature. Other writers have gossiped about their books; only James has made interest beget interest, form reflect form, to create in the end a new *genre*. When one further considers the enormous opportunities which such a task offers for self-conscious posing, for conceit and self-pity, for all the capering and posturing which a human being naturally assumes before a mirror, we can only gasp at the delicacy and decency with which James approached his own image.

The themes which preoccupy James in these prefaces

<sup>1</sup> Henry James: *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. Edited by R. P. Blackmur. London (Scribners), 1935.

## A Coat of Many Colours

relate either to art in general, or to the art of the novel in particular. It would seem that art in general must be considered on the plan of life in general, for art, whatever its form, derives its substance from life. But the phrase "in general" must not be interpreted too inclusively. Art claims the whole of life as its field, but once in the field it is selective. Art delimits, particularizes, formalizes. Such, at least, was the faith upon which James acted; and the whole problem was for him the problem of carrying out this necessary operation without killing the patient. The patient, indeed, had to be given new life—life lucid, intelligent, and reformed. In a word, life was, by means of art, to be given a *meaning*. There was life of a sort in *The Newcomes*, *The Three Musketeers*, or *War and Peace*.

But what [he asked] do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*? We have heard it maintained, we will remember, that such things are "superior to art"; but we understand least of all what *that* may mean, and we look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius, who will come to our aid and tell us. There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from "counting", I delight in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form.

It is magnificently said, and to all his explanations of how he achieved his economy and form the world is willing to listen and learn. On the commanding centre as a principle of composition; on dramatic construction; on the *nouvelle* or long short story as a form; on development and continuity; on antithesis of characters; on foreshortening; on narrative in the first person; on these and on many other technical matters James is admittedly the highest authority. But critics who are willing to accept his authority in these matters are in the habit of somewhat illogically questioning his right to sweep aside

## Henry James

the works of Thackeray, Tolstoy and Dumas. They return to the question of "life", and in the name of this undefined entity they are willing to condemn, not only Henry James, but the whole tradition of art for which he stood.

Since this question, under the increasing pressure of social events, tends more and more to occupy the critical consciousness of a younger generation, it deserves a closer examination in the light of the mobilized intelligence of Henry James. Life, for his critics, is rightly associated with economic realities; these realities, they declare, have determined all our values, æsthetic no less than ethical and social. Their materialistic determinism spares nothing, and though they may experience some difficulty in explaining the actual morphology of art in economic terms, they are ready to assert that though some forms are relatively static, the public estimation or appreciation of them varies from age to age. This is the dialectical method in all its casuistical subtlety, but those who use the method in the interests of a particular conception of society sometimes forget that it is a double-edged tool; it merely reduces all our judgements to the same level of sceptical relativity, and if we are unwilling to remain in such a state, sets us off on a new search for a conception of humanity more in accordance with the ground base of history.

In one such work inspired by the method of dialectical materialism, Henry James was described as "an American aristocrat who had fled from his savage compatriots, settled in the more hospitable land of monarchs and lords, and given full vent to his minutious analysis of the most inconceivably petty incidents of life". This, which reads like an extract from a comic "potted" history, is offered to us in all seriousness, and what must interest the critics, and what would have set Henry James himself off in eager speculation, is the nature of the alternative conception of life and its profundities held by the critic. There are, in



## A Coat of Many Colours

art's relation to life, profundities of imaginative symbol and allegory which James did not attempt because he knew instinctively that they were not his *genre* ; but these are not alternatives likely to be suggested by our critic, who is a Russian. We can only conclude that he has in mind " the more formidable mass and weight of things ", and that he would have these imported, raw and heavy, into the art of fiction. But it would be a mistake, and evidence of a most superficial knowledge of his work, to assume that Henry James had not faced up to this problem, and given his most definite reasons for rejecting what might be called the Zolaesque method. The preface to *The Princess Casamassima* is perhaps the most forceful statement of his point of view, for in that novel he had come as near as he was ever to come to the proletarian world and its revolutionary ferment. His sense of detachment, of exclusion, had to be justified ; for it would not be like James to pretend to a sympathy which he did not feel. He freely admitted that there existed " mysteries (dense categories of dark arcana) for every spectator, and it's in a degree an exclusion and a state of weakness to be without experience of the meaner conditions, the lower manners and types, the general sordid struggle, the weight of the burden of labour, the ignorance, the misery and the vice ". But it is not mere fastidiousness in the artist, not in any sense a conscious or unconscious class disdain, which leads him to exclude such mysteries from his work, but rather an honest recognition of his limitations, which limitations make the honesty and perfection of the art he practises.

In the immediate field of life, for action, for application, for getting through a job, nothing may so much matter perhaps as the descent of a suspended weight on this, that or the other spot, with all its subjective concomitants quite secondary and irrelevant. But the affair of the painter is not the immediate, it is the

## Henry James

reflected field of life, the realm not of application, but of *appreciation*—a truth that makes our measure of effect altogether different.

Between application with its specific task—ethical, economic, or whatever—and appreciation with its purely personal logic of intensity, lies the whole difference between the outlook of the artist and of all those who in the name of dogmatic belief (and it matters not whether it is Marxism at one end of the scale or Catholicism at the other end) would bend the artist to some purpose or propaganda. The intelligence of Henry James never, in all its brilliance, shines out more clearly than in his anticipation of this problem, which political circumstances have since made the most urgent problem for writers in every country. There is, of course, a sense in which the whole philosophy of individualism is involved; but to sacrifice individual values is to sacrifice the very concept of art such as it has existed since the beginnings of civilization. To keep art, and to keep individualism, is to keep the sense of limitation, of partiality, of non-participation. The preface already mentioned concludes with what James calls a defence of *his* "artistic position"; it might be quoted as a defence of *the* artistic position:

Shouldn't I find it in the happy contention that the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what "goes on" irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface? I couldn't deal with that positive quantity for itself—my subject had another too exacting side; but I might perhaps show the social car as on occasion applied to the ground, or catch some gust of the hot breath that I had at many an hour seemed to see escape and hover. What it all came back to was, no doubt, something like *this* wisdom—that if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating

## A Coat of Many Colours

imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured ; but that if you *are* so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal.

### 8. *Art and War*

IT is a curious fact that war, which has inspired some of the greatest literature of the world, from Homer to Tolstoy, has never been the preoccupation of a great painter. There are a few famous battle-pieces, but with the possible exception of Uccello's "Rout of San Romano", they have played no important part in the history of art. Even Uccello's picture is significant as an exercise in perspective, and not as a comment on war. Leonardo applied all his unique intelligence to the subject, and painted at least one great battle-piece, but as one can see very clearly from the remarks he made in his Notebooks, his interest was entirely technical and strictly objective. "Show the figures in the foreground covered with dust on their hair and eyebrows and such other level parts as afford the dust a space to lodge"—and so on. One feels that Leonardo is rather more interested in the dust of battle than in its terror, and, indeed, his directions for representing blood, pain and death are equally matter-of-fact. It is not until the beginning of the seventeenth century, and then in the anomalous figure of Jacques Callot, that the attitude of the artist changes, and we get a rendering of a subjective reaction to the "miseries" of war. I do not know what circumstances caused Callot, rather late in his short life, to desert his mannered fantasies for a mordant realism. One would like to think that it was the reaction of a man who had been too often importuned, by his royal patrons, to give an adventitious glory to their military achievements. Or is it merely that from the grotesque, for which he always

## Art and War

had a talent, it is only one step to the tragic? For whatever reason, Callot established himself as the first consistent realist in the depiction of war, and his etchings of "The Miseries of War" remain one of the greatest indictments of man's inhumanity to man.

Further, Callot had made a technical discovery—simply that, to do justice to the horrors of war, an incisive medium like the etcher's needle or the pen was necessary: and looking forward to the outstanding achievements in this same *genre* of the succeeding three centuries, we can see that for some reason neither the plasticity of paint, nor the permanent exhibition for which the painted canvas is intended, were suited to such a subject. It would be good for humanity, perhaps, if representations of its periodical descents into bestiality could be hung permanently in their private rooms and public galleries: but obviously only a masochist would get any pleasure from such a *décor*. Such ascetic revelations are secret, and best worn next to the skin, like hair-shirts. Etchings and drawings are therefore appropriate because we can keep them in portfolios, and go to them, as the faithful to the confessional—and as frequently.

When we come to the next, and to the greatest exposé of war's horrors, it is again the swift and acid line of the etcher which proves to be the appropriate medium. Goya's "Désastres" are not only the most relentless, the most true, comments which a genius has ever made on the irrational nature of war: they are also the highest perfection which the art of etching has ever reached. The plate seems to be bitten with the tragic essence of the theme rather than with a watery acid.

I do not wish to suggest that war, two centuries after Callot's time, had grown in its power for evil. War has been equally horrible from its inception, and the distance between pain and the release of death cannot be indefinitely

## A Coat of Many Colours

prolonged. It is a question of the artist's power of observation—Goya observed more than Callot : observed subtler details—not the level parts which afford the dust a space to lodge, but the savage twists of agony in human limbs and the still more savage twists in atrocious human minds.

Goya lived to see what he might possibly have conceived to be a more enlightened age, a more pacific era. But before he died another artist who was to continue his tradition was already at work—Honoré Daumier. Daumier, profound observer as he was of human nature, was not so specifically an observer of the realities of the warfare waged by human beings as was Goya or even Callot. Daumier's lithographs devoted to the subject of war are part of a social satire of far wider scope, and though they can be horrible enough, they are generalized—are even, in a sense that need not be derogatory, journalistic. They are much more—to use a word from the jargon of our time—"ideological" than Goya's etchings. Marvellous as technical achievements, they do not so much reveal the nature of war, as the motives of those who wage war. War for Daumier was essentially political, his subjects mainly drawn from civil conflicts. Not that the ferocity is thereby abated : civil war has horrors all its own, as we saw but recently in Spain.

### 9. *George Herbert*

COLERIDGE, who did so much to restore Herbert's reputation as a poet, gave him as an example of the "neutral" style, by which he meant a style common to both prose and verse. This did not imply any condemnation of the poetic quality of the poems, which Coleridge rightly considered "exquisite of their kind"; it was merely that, for a proper appreciation, the kind needed to be defined.

## George Herbert

Epithets like "homely", "quaint", and "simple", which have often been used in connection with Herbert's poetry, had led to the quite erroneous assumption that the style was artless. The most often quoted of his poems, "Virtue", aided this assumption, for it is not representative. So did the pious devotion of John Wesley, who, an enthusiast in a century of neglect, "cut down Herbert's intricate metrical patterns to the Procrustean bed of Common, Long, and Short Measure, all of them iambic, to fit them for singing to familiar tunes". Coleridge put an end to this fallacy, and since Coleridge's day, and particularly in our own time, a just appreciation of Herbert's craftsmanship has become fairly general.

We can best define Herbert's kind of poetry by a few contrasts. He is usually described as a follower of Donne, but he has none of Donne's intensity, and little of his metaphysical complexity. Herbert's ideal of life, as set forth in one of his prose works, is that of "the country parson", of one who is "exceeding exact in his life, being holy, just, prudent, temperate, bold, grave in all his ways", and these same words might be used to describe the spirit of his verse, while the parson's knowledge and preaching are its content. But again we must not suppose that the virtues are aspects of personal simplicity. Herbert had thought deeply and originally on religious issues. The simplicity was an ideal to be achieved in expression, not in the mental processes themselves.

The simplicity of his style is due, first to an economy of imagery, and then to a conversational ease of diction. It is the modern habit to crowd as many images into a poem as raisins into a plum-pudding. Herbert, by contrast, will take a single image and exploit all its potentialities in a poem of considerable length. Indeed, the whole of his poetry is but the extension of one image, the Temple, or Church, its furnishings and usages.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Partly as a result of sustaining a single image over a number of stanzas, the diction of the poem tends to be sequential, linked to the logical development of an argument for which the long sentence, compact with relative or qualifying clauses, is most appropriate. Such sentences, and such arguments, are convincing in the degree that they are direct and intimate. It is for this reason that Herbert's poems are very good to recite, by anyone who cares to discover their inherent melody :

Deare Friend, sit down, the tale is long and sad :  
And in my faintings I presume your love  
Will more complie then help. A Lord I had . . .  
To him I brought a dish of fruit one day . . .

It is "delicious", as Coleridge said of one of these poems. And yet sometimes very subtle, as in the poem Coleridge had in mind, "The Flower" :

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean  
Are thy returns ! ev'n as the flowers in spring ;  
To which, besides their own demean,  
The lâte-pâst frôsts tributes of plêasure bring.  
Grief melts away  
Like snow in May,  
As if there were no such cold thing.

No other poet until Hopkins came would have ventured to place four successive stresses in a line, thereby achieving such a pleasing and unexpected variety of rhythm.

### 10. *Cézanne*

CÉZANNE was a man of a very clear and definite intelligence, who early in life decided to devote himself to particular aims and who from that time allowed nothing to interfere with his career. Certain things he deliberately excluded from his life—politics, for instance, and almost

## Cézanne

every kind of personal attachment. It is true he procured a wife, but "procured" is the only word for a convenient alliance which he never allowed to stand in the way of his painting. He made a few friends—Camille Pissarro, for example, and Gasquet and Vollard ; but it is typical of the man that his best friends were two or three school-fellows, the chief of these being Zola. One of the earliest letters which Zola wrote to his friend from Paris shows clearly how well Zola understood his friend, but how little he appreciated the significance of his qualities. " Shall I tell you something?—above all don't get angry—you lack character ; you have a horror of exertion of any kind, in thought as well as in deed ; your great principle is to let things slide, and to pick them up again at random." Zola wrote a fuller analysis to their common friend Baille, which is even more to the point :

To convince Cézanne of anything is like trying to persuade the towers of Notre Dame to dance a quadrille. He might say yes, but he would not budge a hair's breadth. And remember that age has increased his stubbornness, without giving him reasonable material to be stubborn about. He is made all of a piece, rigid and hard ; nothing bends him, nothing can drag a concession from him. He will not even discuss his thoughts ; he has a horror of arguments, firstly because talking is tiring, and also because he might have to change his opinion if his opponent were in the right. . . . I had hoped that age would modify him a little. But I find him the same as I left him. So my line of action is very simple : never to impede his fancy ; at most to give him advice very indirectly ; to put the fate of our friendship at the mercy of his own good nature, never to force his hand to clasp mine ; in a word, to efface myself completely. . . .

But Zola could not efface himself—the self which he became under the drive of the " character " which he possessed in abundance, but which Cézanne so evidently



## A Coat of Many Colours

lacked. For there is no contradiction between Cézanne's lack of character, and the consistency of his personality. Cézanne knew that he possessed what he himself called "temperament"; and he knew that "it is only the initial force, *id est* temperament, that can carry one to the goal one is seeking". His genius lay precisely in his realization of that fact, and in his determination to preserve his "temperament" from all the fixations of a man of character such as Zola. But it is only by virtue of such fixations that worldly success can be gained. Zola gained it—gained it to such a degree that Cézanne no longer felt comfortable in his house. The great friendship came to an end in 1886, and there is still no first-hand evidence to account for the break. Vollard's story rings true, however. He quotes Cézanne as saying :

No harsh words passed between us. It was I who stopped going to see Zola. I was not at my ease there any longer, with the fine rugs on the floor, the servants, and Émile enthroned behind a carved wooden desk. It all gave me the feeling that I was paying a visit to a minister of state. He had become (excuse me, Monsieur Vollard—I don't say it in bad part) a dirty bourgeois.

All Cézanne's qualities—his stubbornness, his morbid fear of entanglements, his respect for authority, his timidity in the presence of women—all were a reflection of his inward sensitiveness, his respect for his own sensations, his determination to "realize" these sensations, in all their uniqueness and integrity. At the age of thirty-five he wrote to his mother :

I am beginning to find myself stronger than any of those around me, and you know that the good opinion I hold of myself has not come to me without good reason. I must go on working, but not in order to attain a finished perfection, which is so much sought after by imbeciles. And this quality which is commonly so much

## Cézanne

admired is nothing but the accomplishment of a craftsman, and makes any work produced in that way inartistic and vulgar. *I must not try to finish anything except for the pleasure of making it truer and wiser.*

If that last sentence which I have italicized is meditated upon, it will be found to contain the whole secret of Cézanne—the reason why in his quiet way he gave birth to the greatest revolution in art since Giotto ; and the reason why his friend Zola gave birth to nothing but a mountain of dead literature.

If we are to measure the greatness of artists by their influence on their successors, it is already sufficiently clear that Cézanne surpasses all his contemporaries, and that by means of Cézanne France made one of the decisive contributions to modern civilization. Cézanne was the founder of a new epoch in painting. The general nature of his achievement has been called “ neo-classicism ”, a term which conveys a notion of revivalism and reaction quite foreign to Cézanne’s nature. It is true that Cézanne used certain phrases which seem to indicate that he preferred the methods of Poussin to those of the Impressionists, but when we look carefully at these reported sayings, they are seen to involve a criticism of Poussin no less than of Cézanne’s contemporaries. “ Vivifier Poussin sur nature ”, for example, implies that Poussin’s method must be vivified, made more vital, by means of the study of nature. “ Redevenir classique par la nature, c’est-à-dire par la sensation ” implies that classicism, as commonly understood, fails to make a direct sensational approach to nature. The ideal of perfection which is the ideal of classicism—that Cézanne accepted ; but the ideal must not be conceived intellectually, nor is it to be attained by academic rules. It must be a direct product of the contemplation of nature.

Cézanne’s problem was in the first instance a per-

## A Coat of Many Colours

sonal one. As a youth he was what is commonly called "romantic"—that is to say, his thoughts were directed to a world of ideal creatures, mostly derived from imaginative literature. One of his early pictures is a copy of a very Byronic "Prisoner of Chillon" in the local museum at Aix: another composition of the same time represents a winged figure (Inspiration) kissing the brow of a sleeping poet. According to the superficial view, such paintings represent an adolescent phase which the poet gradually outgrows; but actually similar subjects, treated in a very different manner, crop up at every stage of Cézanne's career; the series of "Baigneuses" which he painted in his last years are directly related to the romantic compositions of his youth. The truth is that there existed in Cézanne, as in every great artist, a strain which may be called variously romantic, or idealistic, or transcendental. But when he began to paint, Cézanne found that this strain, in itself, did not induce a good technique of painting. It led to fluidity, sentimentality, artifice and compromise. He therefore began to paint objectively—to paint inanimate objects (still-life), landscapes (more particularly rocks and buildings, things with a definite structure) and portraits. He soon discovered that he was committed to an endless discipline—that the task of "realizing" the objective nature of natural objects in terms of paint and canvas was one which had scarcely been begun by the artists of the past. More particularly, he discovered that there was an intimate link between form and colour in nature—that the painter could not contemplate nature under these two aspects separately, but that he must design in colour. In other words, precision of design does not exist as a thing in itself, but depends on harmony of colour.

Such is the nature of the revolution which Cézanne brought about—perhaps in itself a technical matter which only painters and connoisseurs can fully appreciate. But

## Cézanne

Cézanne did not imply that painting should stop with the solution of this problem. He wished to apply his basic technique to the painting of ideal compositions ; and the great art of the future, as he conceived it, would be one which employed this technique—based on the objective study of nature—in the painting of poetic or literary subjects in the manner of Poussin. Cézanne himself did not live to achieve such a complete art ; and though his work has had an incalculable influence on the art of his successors, it is certain that none of them has come any nearer to it, with the possible exception of Picasso. Ironically enough, it was one of the superficial aspects of Cézanne's art which was to have most influence. His reduction of objects to their essential planes and the harmonization of the colour relations of these planes produced a geometrical effect which was then imitated for its own sake and resulted in the phase known as Cubism. From Cubism has developed the present school of abstract or constructive art, and by way of reaction to this development we have had the extreme romanticism of surrealism. The ideal still remains the same : a synthesis of these two extremes. It is unlikely that we shall ever return to the poetic themes which inspired Poussin ; but if an essentially modern poetry could be realized with the acute sensational lucidity which Cézanne felt before nature, a new stage in the history of art would have been reached. The significance of Cézanne is that he made such an eventuality credible.

There remains a charge which must, in spite of all his greatness, be brought against Cézanne : the charge that he lacked, in life no less than in his art, inventive imagination. In general (and a rare exception like the " *Scène fantastique* " only makes the fact more evident) Cézanne's work is completely devoid of fantasy ; it is even devoid of what, in the work of a painter like Giorgione, we may call poesy. It is irrelevant to argue that these are non-

## A Coat of Many Colours

plastic or literary qualities. Criticism which limits itself to the medium is merely elementary. In the end we are concerned with the interpretation of experience, and from this point of view we are entitled to object that the very notion of "nature" or "reality" to which Cézanne confined himself was an arbitrary one, typical of the scientific and social ideology of his time.

### II. *The "Prelude" in Wartime*

It would be hypocritical of me to suggest that I have habitually turned to Wordsworth's *Prelude* for solace or inspiration in a time of universal horror and despair ; as a matter of fact, I am too sadly busy to turn to any book in the leisurely manner implied in such a claim. But I am continually aware of the presence of this poem ; I have several editions of it at hand, and certainly there is no other poem in the English language to which I would so confidently refer my friends for that reanimation which only the best philosophical poetry can give us. I do not suggest that the poem has any particular bearing on the war, on the problems of modern politics, or on the future of the world. Its philosophical message is at once too individualistic and too universal for such ready application. The poem has, of course, its historical significance. It stands at the mid-point of a revolution as significant as the one we are now enduring. It is the autobiography of a poet who was then a revolutionary, and nothing that Wordsworth could subsequently do to the poem could alter its revolutionary significance. Wordsworth, in fact, more than Shelley or Byron, represents the revolt against the literary and political deals of a century. But equally he can be described as looking forward over a century, and giving that century, the nineteenth, new poetic and philosophical ideals.

## The "Prelude" in Wartime

The *Prelude* occupies an integral position in the period which saw the rise of the Romantic Tradition. Begun by Wordsworth in 1798 and completed in 1805, it was not published until 1850. I shall consider presently the reasons which led Wordsworth to hold back the poem, but it should be realized that the *Prelude* was never put aside as in any sense unworthy of publication. During the whole of the fifty years between the first and final version, the poet went on revising his manuscript, and there exist no less than five almost complete versions, besides several drafts of separate parts of the poem. All these may be studied in the great critical edition of the *Prelude* edited by Ernest de Sélincourt, a volume which is indispensable for anyone who would understand not only this poem and its author, but also the workings of the poetic mind in general.

It is natural to ask which of these versions of the *Prelude* is the best one to read. Well, outside Professor de Sélincourt's edition, there is not much choice, for it is always the 1850 version that is printed; and Professor de Sélincourt himself is of the opinion that this version is as a whole the best one. But "as a whole" implies that *in parts* the other versions are superior, and Professor de Sélincourt admits that

the ideal text of the *Prelude* : . . would follow no single manuscript. It would retain from the earliest version such familiar details as have any autobiographical significance. Of purely stylistic changes from that text, it would accept those only which Wordsworth might have made . . . had he prepared the poem for the press in his greatest period, changes designed to remove crudities of expression, and to develop or clarify his original meaning: but it would reject those later excrescences of a manner less pure, at times even meretricious, which are out of key with the spirit in which the poem was first conceived and executed. Most firmly it would reject all modifications of his original thought and attitude to his theme.

## A Coat of Many Colours

The *Prelude* is a poem of epic length ; it has the structure and scale of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but whereas *Paradise Lost* sets out to justify the ways of God to Man, the *Prelude* has no other aim but to justify William Wordsworth to himself. It was not, of course, the first time that a poet had brought himself into his work ; that is a general tendency which began with the Renaissance, and Milton was largely concerned with himself and his personal experiences in a poem like *Samson Agonistes*. But Milton, it might be said, had the decency to objectify his self-observation—to embody it in a myth, so that we approach it indirectly. And that, it might be said, is in general the way of art. In classical art, at any rate, the personal reference is always oblique, implied rather than stated openly. Wordsworth himself admitted that "it was a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself", but the departure from precedent was deliberate, and implicit in his theory of poetry. In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* you will find the new principle clearly enunciated. Another circumstance which distinguishes these poems, he says, is that "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling". If this principle of the primacy of feeling is followed to its logical conclusion, then the fountain of feeling—the poet's own mind—becomes the most natural of all themes. The subtitle of the *Prelude* is "The Growth of a Poet's Mind", and that theme can only be developed by describing the actions and situations which had been responsible for the mind's growth. None of the usual epic themes from mythology or national history could be relied on to generate the same degree of feeling. Beyond the poet's experiences there was, indeed, another theme to which this poem was, as its title indicates, but a prelude ; that larger work was to be "a moral and philosophical

## The "Prelude" in Wartime

poem, the subject 'whatever I find most interesting in Nature, Man, and Society'—but it is still a personal theme—what *I*, the poet, find interesting, *my* moral and philosophical ideas on Man, Nature and Society, *my* personal vision of the universe. One has only to compare this conception—a conception which includes not only the *Prelude*, but the greater philosophical poem that was never completed—one has only to compare this conception of Wordsworth's with Dante's *Divine Comedy* to see what some people would call the originality, and others the enormity, of the undertaking. Dante, it is true, also introduces himself into his epic—that only makes the comparison more interesting. But Dante is merely there as a spectator, as an eye-witness. His aim as a poet is not to express his personal vision of the universe, but to incorporate in one inclusive and unified allegory all the diverse elements of the thought and aspirations of his times. His poem is therefore a synthetic view of the universe, and he himself only obtrudes to give unity of perception and feeling to this synthesis. He does not altogether succeed ; his poem, as a great Italian critic, Francesco de Sanctis, has said, "is too largely composed of thought—crude scholastic thought, or else ornamented, indeed, by imagery, but by imagery without sufficient strength to overcome its abstractness". Dante's very shortcomings, insignificant as they are in view of the magnitude of his achievement, are nevertheless an adequate excuse for a poet, five hundred years later, trying out another method. But let us realize very fully how different that method was ; let us realize, too, that it was a complete failure. Neither Wordsworth nor any other poet of the Romantic Movement ever succeeded in expressing in a poem what Coleridge used to call "the totality of a system". What Coleridge demanded of such a poem was "the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of



## A Coat of Many Colours,

*poetry* ; but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy* ; not doubting from the advantages of the subject that the totality of a system was not only capable of being harmonized with, but even calculated to aid, the unity of a poem". But that is precisely what we must doubt—we must doubt whether the rational processes involved in the elaboration of a system of philosophy can ever be reconciled with the emotional processes involved in the creation of a poem. The truth is that poetry—indeed, all art—accepts contradictions ; it is an irrational activity whose only object is to seize and enhance the objective sensuous elements of life in a reality which is organic, and not in a wholeness which is logical.

We must therefore fall back upon the purely autobiographical significance of the *Prelude*, and though it may incidentally express a philosophy which was Wordsworth's own, we need not consider it as in any sense a philosophical poem. It is a poem about the childhood, adolescence and early manhood of a poet. It teaches us more about the psychology of the poet than about Man, Nature and Society. And if it is read from this point of view, it is, apart from all its poetic values, a fascinating document, equal in interest, I would say, to the *Confessions* of Rousseau. But that, perhaps, is another comparison which is worth pursuing for a minute. There is one particular in which the *Prelude* falls short of the *Confessions*—it is not so frank. Both these authors were men of strong moral inclinations. Both had committed what they regarded as moral indiscretions, if not crimes ; both were tortured with feelings of remorse. But whereas Rousseau exposed himself relentlessly, if not always truthfully, Wordsworth played a game of hide and seek, not only with the world, but with his conscience. The original version of the *Prelude* included a disguised account of Wordsworth's liaison with Annette Vallon. Wordsworth

## The "Prelude" in Wartime

evidently felt that this episode, in the body of his autobiographical poem, was too revealing, so he deleted it, and published it separately in 1820 as the story of *Vaudracour and Julia*. This is not the only evasion in the published version of the *Prelude*; by many small but subtle changes Wordsworth sought to disguise his youthful ideas on politics and religion. We can have no objection to Wordsworth's change of opinions—it is a natural process in a man who lives so long. We cannot object to the appearance of these revised opinions in his later work; but what is inexcusable is that in an autobiographical work an old man should falsify the feelings and aspirations of his youth.

Here let me say a few words about those feelings and aspirations. I believe that in his deepest intuitions Wordsworth reached a position nearer to Eastern philosophy than that of any other European poet. That philosophy is perhaps expressed more completely in *The Recluse* and in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, but there is an early expression of it in the first book of the *Prelude*, which is short enough to quote:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe !  
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,  
That givest to forms and images a breath  
And everlasting motion, not in vain  
By day or star-light didst thou intertwine for me  
The passions that build up our human soul ;  
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,  
But with high objects, with enduring things—  
With life and nature, purifying thus  
The elements of feeling and of thought,  
And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
Both pain and fear, until we recognize  
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

This early philosophy of Wordsworth's is usually described as pantheistic, and this ambiguous word must perhaps suffice to describe what is a very personal vision.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Pantheism is the doctrine that divinity is immanent in the universe, but Wordsworth's mysticism is more positive, more constructive than this. The spirit immanent in the universe is formative, dynamic, even æsthetic. "The mind of man", Wordsworth wrote in the early version of the *Prelude* "is fram'd even like the breath and harmony of music"; and in the final version this passage took the form of those famous lines beginning :

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music ; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society.

"In one society"—that is the point. At the beginning of the century Wordsworth had reached by intuition a conception of the harmonic structure of the universe for which the scientific basis has been provided by modern physics. It is possible that he was inspired to some extent by a theologian of whose works he was to express strong disapproval when he became more orthodox—I mean William Paley, whose *Natural Theology* was published in 1802, just at the time when Wordsworth was writing his first version of the *Prelude*. A study of Wordsworth's relationship to Paley would, I suspect, be very rewarding. But what I would like to suggest here is that a natural affinity exists between Wordsworth's mysticism and the religious conceptions of Taoism and Buddhism. I do not suppose that there was any direct connection, though through the medium of Coleridge almost any religious or philosophical influence in the world might have been brought to bear on Wordsworth.

Let me now turn rather abruptly to another aspect of the *Prelude*—what might be called its technical achievement. Wordsworth had meditated very profoundly on the technique of verse—his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*

## The "Prelude" in Wartime

is the greatest contribution to poetic theory in our language. We may therefore be sure that his choice of blank verse for his principal work was very deliberate. Now blank verse—the very name is forbidding—is a tricky medium of expression. It very easily degenerates into prosiness, banality and insipidity, or into an artificiality due to a desire to avoid these faults. Wordsworth did not avoid any of these faults, but it is remarkable in so long a poem how rarely the diction descends to flatness and bathos. For the most part it pursues a course of heightened expression which, while not inspired, is what he aimed at—"a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation . . ." adapted to "metrical arrangement". But frequently it becomes something more than this. The metre remains the same, the words are not noticeably different, but by gradual and imperceptible degrees a new tone or intensity is developed. We might apply to Wordsworth a remark Coleridge once made of Dryden—that his genius "was of the sort that catches fire by its own motion; his chariot wheels get hot by driving fast". But *light*, rather than *heat*, is the quality generated by Wordsworth. Many famous passages could be quoted in illustration, but here I would like to draw attention to a few lines which may not be so familiar because Wordsworth discarded them from the final version of the *Prelude* (Book IV) presumably because they expressed an animal delight of which he had grown ashamed. He is describing a walk by night along a public road, which in its deserted silence seems to assume a quietness deeper than pathless solitudes. He slowly mounted up a steep ascent

Where the road's watery surface, to the ridge  
Of that sharp rising, glitter'd in the moon,  
And seem'd before my eyes another stream  
Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook  
That murmur'd in the valley. . . .

## A Coat of Many Colours

He then describes how his exhausted mind, worn out by toil, was in a listless state, and all unworthy of the deeper joy that awaited him. Then comes the passage to which I am referring :

Thus did I steal along that silent road,  
My body from the stillness drinking in  
A restoration like the calm of sleep,  
But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,  
Around me, all was peace and solitude,  
I look'd not round, nor did the solitude  
Speak to my eye ; but it was heard and felt.  
O happy state ! what beauteous pictures now  
Rose in harmonious imagery—they rose  
As from some distant region of my soul  
And came along like dreams ; yet such as left  
Obscurely mingled with their passing forms  
A consciousness of animal delight,  
A self-possession felt in every pause  
And every gentle movement of my frame.

This is not so absolutely poetic as a passage which occurs a page earlier, in which Wordsworth describes an early walk home across the fields after a night of dancing, gaiety and mirth :

### Magnificent

The morning rose, in memorable pomp,  
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,  
The sea lay laughing at a distance ; near,  
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,  
Grain-tinctur'd, drenched in empyrean light ;  
And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—  
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,  
And labourers going forth to till the fields.

That is one of the supreme moments of English poetry, inspired in every syllable and accent ! But I would ask the reader to study the first passage I have quoted, and others like it. It is not so bright, but then it is not describing such concrete things. It is subjective, expressing a

## Bosch and Dali .

state of mind. And therein lies Wordsworth's uniqueness and the source of his enduring influence. I could find many a passage in English poetry to rival the description of the morning walk—in Spenser, in Shakespeare, in Keats. But I know of no poet who could describe so well that “distant region of the soul” which was moved by the mystery and solitude of the midnight walk.

### 12. *Bosch and Dali*

BOSCH, who was active between 1470 and 1510, seems to have a fair claim to have invented a type of fantasy which Brueghel was to popularize. Brueghel, no doubt, gave this fantasy a broader basis of humour and humanity, and was in other respects a greater artist than Bosch ; but this particular kind of fantasy of which I am speaking has a much more positive and original character in the works of its originator. Though always full of exquisite invention, the majority of Bosch's pictures belong to the realistic school of that time ; that is to say, they represent their themes (generally religious themes) in the lowly terms of the painter's own life and environment. A scene like the “Adoration of the Magi” is set outside a dilapidated Dutch barn, the landscape in the background is North Brabant, and though the Dutch town in the distance meant to represent Bethlehem has a fantastic temple in the middle of it, in front of the temple is a very Dutch windmill. The various personages in these scenes (except, perforce, Balthasar) are local peasants, selected with an obvious bias towards the grotesque. This bias, this itch to caricature humanity, is no doubt present from the beginning. Caricature is perhaps always based on a contempt for the world or for the mass of humanity, and such a contempt for this world, we might expect, would

## A Coat of Many Colours

lead to a corresponding belief in the world beyond. But to a realist of Bosch's type, the most real part of the world beyond would be the Devil and all his works. In any case, what we may fairly assume to be the later work of Bosch shows a preoccupation with themes which give full vent to the world of evil—the Temptation of St. Anthony (his favourite subject), St. Jerome in the Desert, St. John on Patmos, the Last Judgement, Hell itself—these are the subjects which inspired his most characteristic works.

A vivid realization of the supernatural world was, of course, common to the whole of the Middle Ages, but most of the pictorial representations of it stop at the grotesque and the horrible. Bosch went beyond, to the irrational. Most of his paintings of this kind are too detailed to reproduce well, but a mere enumeration of some of the incidents is enough to convey the exceptional nature of his fantasy. The best example to take is the large altarpiece in the Escorial, a triptych showing a Venusberg or Garden of Delights in the centre, with Paradise on the left and Hell on the right. In the middle panel, for example, we find in one section a scene by a river bank ; under the water is an egg from which a round window has been cut, out of which a man peers down a tube of glass at a mouse just entering the tube. From the other end of the egg grows a strange plant whose flower expands into a veined bubble within which is seated a pair of naked lovers. At the side of the flower another figure caresses a giant owl, whilst above, other naked figures sit in attitudes of despair on giant woodpeckers, bullfinches and other birds. In Hell we see a naked figure spreadeagled on a harp ; the harp grows out of a lute, round which a snake twines and binds in its coils a naked man. In a pulpit a bird-headed monster is seated, its feet in jugs, eating a naked corpse from which fly off black birds ; the feet of the corpse grip what looks

## Bosch and Dali

like an inverted powder-horn. Below the pulpit hangs a bubble, from which a figure half-emerges above an open pit. A man caressing a pig is disturbed by a fabulous insect with human limbs and a crest from which a severed human foot is hanging. This is only a haphazard selection from literally hundreds of equally fantastic details. By comparison the fantasy of Salvador Dali is feeble, or, shall we say, sparing.

Those who are not inclined to take Dali seriously will probably draw a distinction between the nature of the inspiration in each case. It is doubtful, however, if such a distinction is worth much. Dali, for example, paints a lady's shoe with a glass of milk standing inside it—he often uses the lady's shoe motive. Those who are familiar with the writings of psychoanalysts will remember that the shoe is one of the most frequent of the sexual symbols that occur in dreams; and most of Dali's motives are recognizable symbols of this sort. It will be said, therefore, that Dali is constructing deliberately, objectively, the kind of fantasy which came to Bosch naturally, subjectively. Only Dali himself could say to what extent he is deliberately making use of Freudian symbolism; but I doubt if his use of it is any more deliberate than Bosch's use of similar symbolism (for no psychoanalyst could fail to characterize much of Bosch's symbolism as sexual). I think the most we could say is that Bosch would not have had a psychological vocabulary to describe what he was doing, and that to the extent to which our thoughts depend on our vocabulary Bosch was innocent of his intention. But in the modern jargon, both Dali and Bosch are resorting for their fantasy to the unconscious; it does not seem to matter very much how they got there.

The similarity between the two artists is still closer. The aim of the surrealists, as Max Ernst has recently declared, is not merely to gain access to the unconscious



## A Coat of Many Colours

and to paint its contents in a descriptive or realistic way : nor is it even to take various elements from the unconscious and with them construct a separate world of fancy ; it is rather their aim to break down the barriers both physical and psychical, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the inner and the outer world, and to create a superreality in which real and unreal, meditation and action, conscious and unconscious, meet and mingle and dominate the whole of life. In Bosch's case, a quite similar intention was inspired by medieval theology, and a very literal belief in the reality of the Life Beyond. To a man of his intense powers of visualization, the present life and the life to come, Paradise and Hell and the World, were all equally real and interpenetrating ; they combined, that is to say, to form a superreality that was the only reality with which an artist could be concerned.

I am not suggesting that what in Dali takes the place of Bosch's theology is an equally adequate sanction for his kind of painting ; apart from a desire to "debunk" what they call the legend of the artist's special genius or talent (for apparently anybody with an accessible unconscious can become a superrealist), and apart from a desire to destroy the whole of the bourgeois ideology of art, the *Surréalistes* cannot be said to have any theology, and their beliefs, in so far as they profess any, are materialistic. It is true that in his recent autobiography, Dali suggests that Europe can only be saved by a return to Catholicism, but one is reminded of Péguy's remark : "A religion is necessary for the people—this is, in a certain sense, the deepest insult that was ever offered to our faith".

# The Paradox of Anarchism

## 13. *The Paradox of Anarchism*

*THE highest perfection of society is found in the union of order and anarchy.*—PROUDHON.

It has been the fashion, especially among orthodox Marxists, to hold in contempt any theory of politics which did not justify itself in action, and this emphasis on action has often led to a confusion of means and ends—the means too often overshadowing the ends and becoming a substitute for them. The dictatorship of the proletariat, for example, at first put forward as a means towards the classless society, becomes stabilized in Russia as the sovereignty of a new class.

Anarchism does not confuse means and ends, theory and practice. As a theory it relies on reason alone, and if the conception of society which it thus arrives at seems utopian and even chimerical, it does not matter, for what is established by right reasoning cannot be surrendered to expediency. Our practical activity may be a gradual approximation towards the ideal, or it may be a sudden revolutionary realization of that ideal, but it must never be a compromise. Proudhon was often accused of being an anarchist in theory, but only a reformist in practice: he was, in fact, an anarchist all the time, who refused to commit himself to the hazards of dictatorship. He would not play the game of politics because he knew that economics were the fundamental reality. And so to-day it is conceivable that a change in the control of financial credit, or a new system of land tenure, might bring us nearer to anarchism than a political revolution which merely transferred the power of the state into the hands of a new set of ambitious gangsters.

Anarchism means literally a society without an *arkhos*, that is to say, without a ruler. It does not mean a society without law and therefore it does not mean a society with-

## A Coat of Many Colours

out order. The anarchist accepts the social contract, but he interprets that contract in a particular way, which he believes to be the way most justified by reason.

The social contract, as expounded by Rousseau, implies that each individual in society surrenders his independence for the common good, with the assumption that only in this way can the liberty of the individual be guaranteed. Liberty is guaranteed by law, and law, to use Rousseau's phrase, is the expression of the general will.

So far we are on common ground, not only with Rousseau, but with the whole democratic tradition which has been built up on the theoretical foundation laid by Rousseau. Where the anarchist diverges from Rousseau, and from that aspect of the democratic tradition which has found expression in parliamentary socialism, is in his interpretation of the manner in which the general will should be formulated and enforced.

Rousseau himself was not consistent on this question. He was quite convinced that some form of state must exist as an expression of the general will, and that the power invested in the state by general consent must be absolute. He was equally convinced that the individual must retain his liberty, and that upon the individual's enjoyment of liberty depended all progress and civilization. He realized that as an historical fact the state and the individual had always come into conflict, and for a solution of this dilemma he fell back upon his theory of education. If every citizen could be brought up to appreciate the beauty and harmony of the laws inherent in nature, he would be as incapable of establishing a tyranny as of enduring one. The society in which he lived would automatically be a natural society, a society of free consent in which law and liberty are but two aspects of the same reality. But such a system of education implies a pre-existing authority to establish it and that authority must be absolute.

## The Paradox of Anarchism

The system of government recommended by Rousseau in *The Social Contract* is an elective aristocracy rather than a true democracy, and to control this aristocracy he imagines a state so small that every individual within it would be able to watch and criticize the government. He probably had something like the Greek city-state in mind as the ideal unit. He certainly had no prevision of the vast complexes of millions of individuals which constitute most modern states, and we can be quite sure that he would have been the first to admit that his system of checks on authority would not work under such conditions.

But his theory of the state, which has had such a profound influence on the development of modern socialism, has been taken over as applicable to these vast conglomerates, and it then becomes a justification for the most absolute kind of authoritarianism. This danger was recognized as long ago as 1815 by Benjamin Constant, who described *The Social Contract* as "le plus terrible auxiliaire de tous les genres de despotisme".

If what Rousseau calls an aristocratic form of government is more or less identical with modern democracy, what he calls democracy is more or less identical with the modern theory of anarchism, and it is interesting to see why he rejects democracy. He does so for two reasons—first, because he regards it as an executive impossibility. A people cannot be continuously assembled to govern itself; it must delegate authority as a mere matter of convenience, and once you have delegated authority, you no longer have a democracy.

His second reason is a typical example of his inconsistency. If there were a people of gods, he says, they could govern themselves democratically, but a government so perfect is unsuitable for men.

But if democracy is the perfect form of government, it is not for one who has proclaimed his faith in the perfectibility

## A Coat of Many Colours

of man to restrict it to the gods. What is good enough for the gods is all the better for man—as an ideal. If the ideal exists we must recognize it and strive, however approximately, to attain it.

But the fundamental question in all this sophistry is ignored by Rousseau. It is the unreality of the notion of the general will. There is probably only one issue on which a people ever expresses unanimous or general will: the defence of their physical liberty. Otherwise they divide according to their temperaments, and though these are limited in number, they are sufficiently diverse and so mutually opposed that in any given geographical area they will give rise to incompatible groups.

On that very account, say Rousseau and many other philosophers, a democracy is impossible.

They are forced to this conclusion because they adhere obstinately to the arbitrary boundaries of the modern state—boundaries established by rivers, seas, mountains and military treaties, and not by reason.

Suppose we were to ignore these boundaries, or abolish them. The realities are, after all, human beings with certain desires: with certain primitive needs. These human beings, according to their needs and sympathies, will *spontaneously* associate themselves into groups for mutual aid, will *voluntarily* organize an economy which ensures the satisfaction of their needs. This is the principle of mutual aid, and it has been explained and justified with much historical and scientific evidence by Kropotkin. It is this principle which the anarchist makes the foundation of his social order, and upon which he believes he can build that democratic form of society which Rousseau felt was reserved for the gods.

It is not necessary here to repeat the empirical evidence for this belief: Kropotkin's great book can now be obtained for sixpence in the Penguin Series, and it is a work whose

## The Paradox of Anarchism

scholarship is acknowledged by sociologists of all schools. The difficulty is not to justify a principle which has sound psychological and empirical evidence to support it, but to apply this principle to the existing state of society.

This we do tentatively by taking the voluntary organizations which already exist and seeing to what extent they are capable of becoming the units in a democratic society. Such organizations are trade unions, syndicates, professional unions and associations—all those groups which crystallize around a human function. We then consider the functions which are now performed by the state, and which are necessary for our well-being, and we ask ourselves to what extent these functions could be entrusted to such voluntary organizations. We come to the conclusion that there are no *essential* functions which could not thus be transferred. It is true that there are functions like making war and charging rent which are not the expression of an impulse towards mutual aid, but it does not need much consideration of such functions to see that they would naturally disappear if the central authority of the state was abolished.

The mistakes of every political thinker from Aristotle to Rousseau have been due to their use of the abstract conception *man*. Their systems assume the substantial uniformity of this creature of their imaginations, and what they actually propose are various forms of authority to enforce uniformity on man.

But the anarchist recognizes the uniqueness of the person, and only allows for organization to the extent that the person seeks sympathy and mutual aid among his fellows. In reality, therefore, the anarchist replaces the *social* contract by the *functional* contract, and the authority of the contract only extends to the fulfilling of a specific function.

The political unitarian or authoritarian conceives society as one body compelled to uniformity. The anarchist con-

## A Coat of Many Colours

ceives society as a balance or harmony of groups, and most of us belong to one or more such groups. The only difficulty is their harmonious interrelation.

But is it so difficult? It is true that trade unions sometimes quarrel with one another, but analyse these quarrels and you will find, either that they proceed from causes outside their function (such as their different conceptions of their place in a non-functional, e.g. capitalist, society) or from personal rivalries, which are a reflection of the struggle for survival in a capitalist world. Such differences of aim bear no relation to the principle of voluntary organization and are indeed excluded by that very concept. In general, trade unions can agree with one another well enough even in a capitalist society, in spite of all its incitement to rivalry and aggressiveness.

If we go outside our own time to the Middle Ages, for example, we find that the functional organization of society, though imperfectly realized, was proved to be quite possible, and its gradual perfection was only thwarted by the rise of capitalism. Other periods and other forms of society, as Kropotkin has shown, fully confirm the possibility of the harmonious interrelationships of functional groups.

Admitted, it may be said, that we can transfer all the economic functions of the state in this way, what about other functions—the administration of criminal law, relationships with foreign countries not at the same stage of social development, education, etc.?

To this question the anarchist has two replies. In the first place he argues that most of these non-functional activities are incidental to a non-functional state—that crime, for example, is largely a reaction to the institution of private property, and that foreign affairs are largely economic in origin and motivation. But it is agreed that there are questions, such as certain aspects of common law,

## The Paradox of Anarchism

infant education, public morality, which may be outside the province of the functional organizations. These, he argues, are matters of common sense, solved by reference to the innate good will of the community. But the community for this purpose need not necessarily be anything so impersonal and so grandiose as a state—in fact, it will be effective in inverse ratio to its size. The most effective community is the smallest—the family. Beyond the family is the parish, the local association of men in contiguous dwellings. Such local associations may form their courts and these courts are sufficient to administer a common law based on common sense. The manor courts in the Middle Ages, for example, dealt with all crimes and misdemeanours save those committed against the artificial entities of the state and the Church.

In this sense anarchism implies a universal decentralization of authority, and a universal simplification of life. Inhuman entities like the modern city will disappear. But anarchism does not necessarily imply a reversion to handicraft and outdoor sanitation. There is no contradiction between anarchism and electric power, anarchism and air transport, anarchism and the division of labour, anarchism and industrial efficiency. Since the functional groups will all be working for their mutual benefit, and not for other people's profit or for mutual destruction, the measure of efficiency will be the appetite for fullness of living.

There is a further consideration of a more topical and more pressing nature. In a remarkable book published recently, *The Crisis of Civilization*, Alfred Cobban has shown that the disasters which have fallen on the Western world are a direct consequence of the adoption by Germany of the theory of popular or national sovereignty, in place of the theory of natural law which had been evolved by the rational movement of thought in the eighteenth century



## A Coat of Many Colours

known as the Enlightenment. German thought, writes Mr. Cobban,

substituted historical rights for natural rights, and the will of the nation, or the *Volk*, for reason as the basis of law and government. . . . The ultimate result of the theory of popular sovereignty was thus the substitution of history for ethics. This tendency was present in the contemporary thought of all countries. It has only achieved a complete triumph in Germany. The distinguishing mark of modern German thought is the dissolution of ethics in the *Volkgeist*; its practical conclusion is that the state is the source of all morality, and the individual must accept the laws and actions of his own state as having ultimate ethical validity.

I will not repeat the detailed evidence which Mr. Cobban, who is a professional historian, offers in support of this statement, but its truth is obvious enough. "Sovereignty, whether it adopts the democratic, nationalist, or socialist disguise, or some amalgam of all three, is the political religion of to-day." It follows that if we are to rid Europe permanently of the menace to peace which Germany represents, we must first of all refute the German conception of sovereignty. So long as this conception remains, as a national religion, there will be a continual resurgence of the instruments of such a policy—armed might and arbitrary aggression.

It was a great German, already alarmed by the tendencies then taking shape, as an immediate reaction from the French Revolution, who warned his countrymen against the monster they were creating.

It is thus [wrote Schiller] that concrete individual life is extinguished, in order that the abstract whole may continue its miserable life, and the state remains for ever a stranger to its citizens, because nowhere does it touch their feelings. The governing authorities find themselves compelled to classify, and thereby simplify, the multiplicity of citizens, and only to know humanity

## The Paradox of Anarchism

in a representative form and at second hand. Accordingly they end by entirely losing sight of humanity, and by confounding it with a simple artificial creation of the understanding, whilst on their part the subject classes cannot help receiving coldly laws that address themselves so little to their personality. At length society, weary of having a burden that the state takes so little trouble to lighten, falls to pieces and is broken up—a destiny that has long since attended most European states. They are dissolved in what may be called a state of moral nature, in which public authority is only one function more, hated and deceived by those who think it necessary, respected only by those who can do without it.<sup>1</sup>

In these prescient words Schiller stated that antagonism between organic freedom and mechanical organizations which has been ignored in the political development of modern Europe, with results which we see all round us now.

Anarchism is the final and most urgent protest against this fate: a recall to those principles which alone can guarantee the harmony of man's being and the creative evolution of his genius.

### 14. *Havelock Ellis*

MOST thoughtful people would include Havelock Ellis among the significant figures of the last fifty years. He was born, as he often reminded us, in the year that saw the first publication of *The Origin of Species*. His first book appeared in 1890 and his last one followed exactly fifty years later. As a scientist he is identified with one rather narrow and disturbing subject—the psychology of sex. As a humanist his interests include the whole range of human endeavour, and he wrote well on an immense variety of literary and philosophical subjects. He was never a

<sup>1</sup> *Letters upon the Æsthetical Education of Man*, VI.

## A Coat of Many Colours

popular author (though the *Dance of Life* was a best-seller in America) but he had a big following. He was, in fact, a modern prophet, and since his god was Eros he never lacked disciples.

Too many people have a claim to be regarded as the last of the Victorians, but it is difficult to imagine a life more remote than the one which is so intimately self-revealed in Ellis's autobiography. It is the life of a natural historian of the old school—not essentially different from that of a village botanist collecting his specimens on his solitary walks and patiently classifying them in a home-made herbarium. Havelock Ellis's specimens came from the most obscure regions of human behaviour, and merely to approach them with a scientific mind involved the violation of our strongest moral and legal taboos. Ellis shrunk from such a public challenge ; after the first charge of obscenity, he published his scientific work elsewhere—in America and France ; and it was not until comparatively recently that it became possible to obtain his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in his native land. He seems to have been timid by nature, and perhaps for this reason did not take up the normal career of a general practitioner for which he was trained. He never in his life made a public speech and rarely appeared at a public function of any kind. He refused pressing and lucrative invitations to visit the United States. But like other timid men, he had his compensating vanity. He was proud of his appearance, and tells us with complacency that he reminded some of his friends of the god Pan, others of Jesus Christ. He was also conceited about his literary style, and certainly it is a clear and workmanlike instrument. But it has no affinity, as he imagined, with the "exquisite" prose of Newman ; and it can be as bad as this : " But while Malaga ostentatiously proclaims its really magnificent claims on the health-seeker, there was not, then at all events, a single hotel in the city which could

## Havelock Ellis

even on the surface be acceptable as a liveable residence for any but hurried business men." He was forced by the nature of his work to invent many neologisms, some of which have passed into general currency ; others, like the verb " to germ ", we may hope will quickly die. Carefully written as it is in general—it was written at leisurely intervals over forty years, the author reserving his " finest moments " for the purpose—his autobiography is nevertheless frequently redundant and altogether shapeless. But with all its faults we may still accept Ellis's suggestion that it is " the most perdurable piece of work " he left behind. He himself gave reasons for its failure to attain the same degree of general interest as the three most famous autobiographical documents in literature—the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, the *Confessions of Rousseau* and the *Memoirs of Casanova* :

The very qualities of sanity and reasonableness, of critical impartiality, of just analytical precision, which made the task fascinating and possible for me, were incompatible with those qualities which had assured the success of Rousseau and Augustine and Casanova, not one of whom had so much as conceived the scientific spirit applied to life.

Here, unconsciously betrayed, is the clue to the sense of unreality which is the final impression left by his *Life*. It is not that it is not an intensely sincere document ; both Ellis and his wife were intensely sincere people. But their very sincerity includes a contradiction, a contradiction which perhaps explains the wider crisis of our civilization. In general this is the clash of rationality and instinct ; or, as Mrs. Ellis expressed it in one of her American lectures, the problem of " how to combine sane eugenics with a fine spirituality ". The background from which Havelock Ellis and his wife emerged was nineteenth-century rationalism : the rationalism of Darwin and Huxley, of the

## A Coat of Many Colours

Fellowship of the New Life and the Fabian Society. But rationalism, for many of these earnest seekers after truth, was not enough ; and they found compensation in sentimentalism. Though Ellis himself did not altogether avoid this reaction, he had sufficient philosophical knowledge and sufficient artistry to give it a clean façade : and it is only in his confessions that we see what havoc it wrought in his own life no less than in the minds of his disciples. What is there told at great length and with unusual frankness can only be glanced at in this note. At the age of thirty-two Ellis married Edith Lees, who was then secretary to the New Fellowship. She was a small but extremely vital woman, expressing her energy in a score of ways : social organization, lecturing, writing, farming, furnishing, etc. The marriage was entered into very deliberately, very "rationally", by both parties, and there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of their mutual attraction. But Ellis confesses his lack of passionate sexual feeling for his wife, and she for her part soon revealed a predominantly homosexual temperament. After a few discordant years "marital relationship in the narrow sense" was permanently brought to an end. But their marriage lasted for twenty-five years, until Mrs. Ellis died a distracted and indeed a mentally unstable woman. Out of this discordant relationship Havelock Ellis constructed his philosophy of love—a philosophy to which he gives very eloquent expression in this book :

Passion transcends sex. I shall never belittle the great roots of sex in life. I know I could not love any man as I have loved this woman. But I have discovered that the sexual impulse of physical attraction may pass away and give place to a passion that is stronger than it. That is a discovery with a significance for life and for the institution of marriage which has not yet been measured. And I smile when I see the ephemeral creatures of a day sneering at love. We who are not the

## Havelock Ellis

creatures of a day, who live greatly, and do the work of the world, we are moved by love so that, rather than belittle love, we would even see a sense in the final extravagance of Dante, and end, as he ends, on the omnipotence of love, "*L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*".

But Dante, whose doctrine of love is so acceptably spiritual, knew nothing of scientific eugenics. He may have had to transcend his animality, which is a natural process of sublimation. But those who, while attempting sublimation, still cling to a rationalization of their animality are doomed to the Calvary which Ellis says he has endured. At the end he has to confess that in spite of all the joy and ecstasy that has been his, he "could almost echo the words of Ninon de Lenclos: 'If I had known what my life was to be I would have killed myself'."

Havelock Ellis's experience of love was by no means confined to this tortured marriage, but the timidity which assailed him in his social contacts seems to have persisted in his more personal relations. "But in that form (excitability) sex seems little to have troubled me. . . . I am regarded as an authority on sex, a fact which has sometimes amused one or two (though not all) of my more intimate women friends." At the same time he thinks of himself "only as a lover—a lover who has fallen far short of perfection". But in the end the world will probably value this man for other qualities: for his reasonableness, his intellectual enterprise, his courage. It is for others to judge the value of his contributions to science. Havelock Ellis had as his exact contemporary Sigmund Freud, and though he never allowed himself to be jealous of his fellow-worker, there can be little doubt that Ellis's old-fashioned "natural history" has been eclipsed by the brilliant analysis and speculation of the rival method. However this may be, in the wider field of human culture, Ellis has

## A Coat of Many Colours

a variety and a grace which would never have been appropriate to a specialist like Freud.

As I look back [he writes towards the end of his Life] I seem to see one who was, instinctively and unconsciously an artist in living, one who used, honestly and courageously, the material of such mixed quality that was put into his hands at the outset and slowly wrought the work that Nature and his own nature—they seemed to him one—had set him to do, together with his own life, into one large and harmonious whole, so that all he lived he wrote and all that he wrote he lived.

Beginning with few advantages, satisfied with modest rewards, without worldly ambition, he nevertheless persisted in the way he had chosen, which was the way of his own inclinations. His happiness was his work, and he did the work for which he thought himself best fitted. Though his scientific work may gradually be superseded and most of his literary work perish for lack of the final grace, this book will endure as the self-portrait of a singularly intelligent human being. It is nearer to Montaigne, whom he never mentions, than to St. Augustine or Rousseau ; and its greatest lesson is one which no author has ever so well revealed : " The weaknesses and defects were overcome, not by any effort of masculine protest to create artificially what was not there, but by accepting the facts of constitution and temperament as they come from Nature and making of them an act by which failure could be woven into success."

### 15. *The Failure of the War Books*

YOUNG writers who took part in the last war came back with one desire : to tell the truth about war, to expose its horrors, its inhumanity, its indignity. They knew that it was no good crying over spilt blood, no good trying to

## The Failure of the War Books

console themselves or their contemporaries. But at least they might warn the coming generations. "All a poet can do to-day is warn," wrote Wilfred Owen. "That is why the true Poets must be truthful."

It took a few years for a new generation to grow up and become war-conscious. In the meantime there was no public for war poetry or war stories. Between 1918 and 1928 it was almost impossible to publish anything realistic about war. Then came the reaction. It was slowly mounting when Remarque wrote *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Remarque, like Owen, wanted to warn the new generation. He did warn them; so did the film which was based on his book. So did scores of books that floated to success on the tide of *All Quiet*, which itself quickly became the best-selling novel of our time.

At first it looked as though the warning had taken effect. After the spate of anti-war literature, there was the famous debate at the Oxford Union at which an overwhelming majority of undergraduates declared that under no circumstances would they ever take up arms. The Peace Pledge Union sprang into existence and its membership reached hundreds of thousands.

It began to look as though our warning had taken effect, but from the beginning there was something specious about this youthful pacifism. It was based on a negation, whereas a true belief is always positive and affirmative. Further, this negation was the negation of an abstraction—war. War, thanks to the war books, was vivid enough to the imagination of these young men: it was a nightmare of senseless killing. But war acquires its reality from psychological and economic forces, and it is useless to protest against war unless at the same time there is some understanding of the workings of these primary forces and some attempt to control them.

But there was no such understanding. These forces



## A Coat of Many Colours

gathered momentum and ten years after the publication of *All Quiet* we were at war again. Our books may have created a few extra conscientious objectors, but in their main purpose, the prevention of another war, they had failed.

In asking the reason for this failure it is easy to be wise after the event and say that our books were not good enough. It is said of *All Quiet*, for example, that it was sentimental. To some extent the criticism is true, but sentimentality was not, for effectiveness, a fault. The nearest parallel to *All Quiet* in the past is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. That was a much more sentimental book than *All Quiet*, yet for that very reason it was largely instrumental in bringing about one of the greatest reforms in the history of mankind—the abolition of slavery. The abolition of war is no doubt a bigger problem, but if books are to play a part in its solution, they will be books at least as sentimental as *All Quiet*.

We must look for a deeper cause of this failure. I believe it can be found in that impulse which is loosely known as sadism, but which is surely something rather broader than that form of sexual perversion. Whatever we call it, there is no doubt that there exists in mankind a love of vicarious suffering and violence. From an early age we delight in stories of strife and bloodshed, and any attempt to eradicate this interest in children only seems to lead to compensatory complexes of a no less disagreeable nature. In writing our war books we were unwittingly ministering to this hidden lust. I have myself been struck by the fact that one and only one of my war poems has been extensively quoted in anthologies and reviews—a simple but very bitter and horrible poem called "The Happy Warrior". From a literary point of view I am sure it is by no means the best of my war poems, but it has had a terrible fascination for many people. It expresses in an extreme degree the horror of war, and it, and other

## The Failure of the War Books

poems and stories of the same kind, should have been an effective warning.

As it is, the suspicion now grows upon me that such writing was fuel to the inner flames of the war spirit. If we human beings have an irresistible urge to destruction, including an urge to self-destruction, then the imagination will feed ravenously on any vivid description of the process of destruction. War is not a spirit that can be exorcised by any form of incantation. It is an impulse that must be eradicated by a patient course of treatment.

That treatment will be partly social and partly psychological. That is to say, the necessary psychological treatment cannot take place in the present order of society, which does everything to perpetuate the impulses of competition and power. It can only take place in a society based on the impulses of mutual aid and service—an order of society where all the tendencies are against rivalry and the domination of groups or individuals. If these tendencies, which are by no means against the order of nature, could be established, then we might reasonably hope to eradicate the destructive impulse itself, and to provide adequate alternatives for the expenditure of the latent psychic energies of mankind.

I do not underestimate the power of propaganda, whether in the form of books or periodicals or the spoken word. Once it is in the hands of a single centralized authority, it can mould mass opinion to almost any kind of belief. It can do almost anything short of changing human nature. It cannot alter the basic instincts of men, and for that reason the uniformity it establishes remains insecure, a façade of stucco without any supporting wall. Human nature can only be changed by environment, genetics and other long-term physical factors. If we want to make mankind a more peace-loving animal, we must first create the right kind of social mould, the right kind of family life,

## A Coat of Many Colours

the right kind of education ; and all these things must be provided on a world scale, because peace must be universal.

We must continue to tell the truth about war, as about all things. But the telling must be a confession of shame and failure. After a second world war either we perish as a civilization or a new generation will create a new literature. Not a literature of reportage, of pride in experience, of vicarious suffering. But a literature of constructive imagination, of social idealism, of positive morality. To learn by experience—that is the method of the animal. In so far as we hope to be more than animals we must learn by what is greater than passive experience—by imaginative experiment.

### 16. *William Morris*

THE centenary of the birth of William Morris in 1934 called forth an unexpected fervour. Perhaps this came mainly from people who were old enough when Morris died in 1896 to have been influenced by his living example, but I feel that even people of my own generation, who if born then were still in their cradles, look back on this great Victorian figure with a keener interest than we give to most of his contemporaries.

Perhaps we feel that he at least was exempt from the prevailing vices of that age—hypocrisy and complacency : and however little sympathy we may have for the actual things he made, or for the style he created, we yet recognize in the manner of his life and in the principles he lived by, an idealism which is more than ever necessary. We realize that Morris rediscovered the artistic *conscience*, the most essential of all qualities in art.

He was the son of wealthy parents, and was educated at Marlborough and Oxford. During his first year at Oxford,

## William Morris

Ruskin published *The Stones of Venice*, and that event (for it was more than a book) determined the rest of Morris's life. When we have traced the workings of Ruskin's doctrines in the robust mind and frame of Morris, we have explained the general course of his life ; any differences are temperamental, not intellectual. But though Ruskin did sometimes apply his doctrines in an eccentric and wasteful fashion, the virtue of Morris is that with all his enthusiasm, and in spite of his financial incapacity, he was essentially a practical genius, carrying theory into action, embodying beauty in the things of use, giving organization to opinion.

It is customary to consider Morris in his threefold aspect as poet, craftsman, and socialist. In this way we break down the fundamental unity of the man. Perhaps he was too normal in his psychology to possess that particular concentration of faculties and sensibilities—always a one-sided concentration—which makes the great artist. His purpose was rather to show how art entered into the life of a normal man, and entered in no merely passive or receptive way. The best joy, he felt, was the joy of making things, and knowing that you made them well. In this spirit a man should be able to make all that he needs, not only his house and his furniture, his tools and utensils, his tapestries and pictures, but even his music and his song ; and he believed that the necessary faculties existed in every human being, and only needed a right ordering of society to educate them and make them adequate.

With such ideals he was led inevitably to oppose the development of machinery, and the ugliness and social degradation that was everywhere accompanying that development. Such unreality as we now associate with the name and the works of Morris is due to the defeat he suffered in this unequal struggle. The machine has triumphed, and only now are we beginning to accept

## A Coat of Many Colours

that inevitable fact, and to work out an æsthetic and social philosophy based on that fact. What Morris actually achieved, in the design of fabrics, wall-papers, and, above all, in typography and books, did have its influence on machine-made products ; it was a good influence, but essentially a superficial one. It was mainly in the sphere of applied ornament and decoration, and did not touch the more fundamental problems of form.

Towards the end of his life, when he had been brought so closely into contact with the realities of the industrial situation through his socialistic activities, Morris had to modify his attitude towards the machine.

These almost miraculous machines, [he wrote in *Art and Socialism*] which if orderly forethought had dealt with them might even now be speedily extinguishing all irksome and unintelligent labour, leaving us free to raise the standard of skill of hand and energy of mind in our workmen, and to produce afresh that loveliness and order which only the hand of man guided by his own soul can produce ; what have they done for us now ?

But that is still the wrong attitude. Machines are more than scavengers and coal-heavers. Properly conceived, they are tools of a precision and power never dreamt of in the days of handicraft (the hand which is powerless without a tool), and using them intelligently we may yet produce a truthful and original style.

There is one further comment to make on Morris's own faith. He once summarized his ideals for art in a "golden rule", which has often been quoted : "If you want a golden rule that will fit everybody, *this is it*. Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." Why, I wonder, did he use the conjunction "or", thus making a division between a knowledge of the useful and a belief in the beautiful ? Does there not lurk under this alternative a false conception of art, a con-

## · Ben Nicholson

ception of art as decoration rather than as form, a conception at the root of all the dreary ugliness of the age in which Morris lived?

Thus we may criticize the actual doctrines of William Morris; but what is more fundamental in him—a conception of life as an æsthetic whole—that is still an ideal for which we may admire him greatly, working out our salvation in the idiom of a new age.

### 17. *Ben Nicholson*

BEN NICHOLSON is the most important painter of the modern “abstract” school now working in England, and with Henry Moore he may be fitly held to represent our contribution to the movement which includes Picasso, Gris, Braque, Léger, Mondrian, Miro, Gabo, Pevsner and Brancusi, to mention a few significant names. We may, therefore, take his work as a test case for considering the value of this movement and its relevance to the future of painting.

His development, though it shows some sudden leaps, has been continuous. Beginning as an artist, concerned, like any other impressionist, with an objective relationship to the world around him, he gradually became more and more absorbed in the purely formal relations of planes, shapes and colours, until finally any direct contact with the world of appearances was lost. In one of his phases he has excluded even colour, being satisfied with the inexhaustible subtleties of whites and greys, and their harmonies in relation to areas, outlines and depths. These works are not so much paintings as reliefs, carved out of woods like walnut and mahogany, or out of synthetic board, and then painted white.

It is often objected to abstract or constructivist art that

## A Coat of Many Colours

by definition it must lead to a kind of stalemate. There is a logical development from representational art to cubism, and from cubism to constructivism, but with constructivism we seem to be at a dead end, with only a limited number of variations to be played on a single theme. There is a story of a composer who committed suicide because he suddenly realized that the number of notes in the scale being fixed, an end must come to the number of permutations and combinations in which they could be arranged—an end, therefore, to the art of music. If he had been mathematician enough to work out the figure, he might have had more courage.

The elements of graphic art are not so limited, but there is an academic kind of abstract art which deliberately restricts itself to fixed elements, and by playing variations on these, would seem to exclude both personal sensibility and social reality. This mechanical manipulation of geometrical elements has nothing in common with the constructive vision displayed in the work of an artist like Ben Nicholson, and only the ambiguity inherent in the word "abstract" could have given rise to such an impression. If the word is quite rightly used to indicate an art that has renounced any intention of reproducing the *natural appearances of phenomena*, it does not necessarily imply a loss of all contact with reality. The basic confusion is between two very different things: reality and realism. Art, the critics of constructivism say, cannot safely depart from nature. But what do they mean by nature? Actually, a philosophical question is involved. Nature is either an aggregate of facts—the sum of all organic things; or it is the principle of life which animates these things. If we think of nature in the first, and what we may call the objective, sense, and consider the function of art in relation to such a conception of nature, then we can conceive art only as reproducing in some way the specific facts. That

## Ben Nicholson

is, indeed, the kind of relation between art and nature which most people seem to want ; but they should realize that what they thus get is not the reality, but merely the appearances of nature. If, on the other hand, we take the subjective conception of nature, and then ask the artist to express this conception in the materials of his craft, he will not imitate the specific appearances of nature, but, taking the sense he has of the underlying spirit, he will try to create works which embody this spirit in their form and colour. These works will have a kind of cousinship with the phenomena of nature, but, being moulded not by sun and soil and all the elements which determine the specific forms of natural organisms, but rather by the senses of the artist reacting to a plastic material, they will have an original appearance reflecting nothing but the reality experienced by the individual. If such individuals lived in cells apart, without any communication or mutual influence, their works would be practically incomprehensible to other people. But, living in societies which mould the individual to a cultural pattern, the chances are that each artist's work will enter into a certain community of feeling and imagination. When that community exists, communication of the artist's experience and emotion takes place. There is no other basis of communication.

Whilst I consider that the most general and most accessible of these intimations of reality are of the organic type, and intimately linked to the essential forms of life, there are other aspects of reality of a more mathematical and crystalline nature which may equally form the basis of the artist's creations. Perhaps Ben Nicholson's intuitions tend in this direction ; whilst Henry Moore's, for example, are more obviously organic. But it would be a mistake to make any hard and fast distinction, because the reality is a unity, of which organic and inorganic forms are but different aspects.



## A Coat of Many Colours

Ben Nicholson who, like all the great artists of the past, is something of a mystic, believes that there is a reality underlying appearances, and that it is his business, by giving material form to his intuition of it, to express the essential nature of this reality. He does not draw that intuition of reality out of a vacuum, but out of a mind attuned to the specific forms of nature—a mind which has stored within it a full awareness of the proportions and harmonies inherent in all natural phenomena, in the universe itself.

I must once more refer to the analogy of music, which cannot be shirked in this connection. There is absolutely no reason in the world why the visual intuitions of an abstract painter should not have every bit as much value as the aural intuitions of the equally abstract musician (and in this sense all great music is abstract).<sup>1</sup> The analogy of architecture is even more to the point, but in this case there is a functional aspect which introduces a certain complication.

Admittedly such an abstract art cannot appeal to everybody ; the music of Bach does not appeal to everybody, but we do not therefore deny its social relevance. We can say, of course, that for the secular culture of to-day Bach's music has lost its real social significance, which was originally religious. But that is tiresome casuistry. Bach's music is socially relevant because it is universally enjoyed among people sensitive to music.

It may be objected that even so the whole process of appreciation, music included, is limited to a small and insignificant number of people. But when, in the whole of

<sup>1</sup> The objections which even a great critic like Sir Donald Tovey makes to this comparison are based on an ambiguous use of the word "abstract". Abstract in this context means "non-representational" (devoid of any reference to phenomenal appearances) ; the works of art themselves are, of course, executed in the concrete materials of paint, wood, stone, sound-vibrations, etc.

## Ben Nicholson

history, has the finest culture of a period been, *at the time of its first creation*, anything but the affair of a small minority? I do not deny that there is a social problem involved. The complete Marxian would damn Bach as well as Ben Nicholson, and to him there is only one answer. Until we have a new social integrity such as he envisages in his ideal of a classless society, we cannot have a great and popular movement in art; and in this age of transition we must, if we are to indulge our æsthetic sensations at all, indulge them in this relatively dilettante fashion. I insist, however, on the qualification "relatively". The art of an abstract painter is not so dilettante in practice as it seems to be in the isolation of a "one-man show". It is, in fact, intimately linked by sympathy and common understanding to the modern movement in architecture. The modern movement in architecture is in its turn intimately linked to the necessity for a scientific transformation of our cities, our dwellings, the whole structure of our future existence. The connection is seen clearly enough by the architects and painters themselves; time will make it clear to everyone.

It must be admitted that abstract art, if it is to retain the interest of the general public, must allow for a subjective element—not only in the artist, but also in the person looking at the picture. And this, for all its severity, is precisely what the art of Ben Nicholson does. He was, from the beginning, essentially a sensitive artist, and those people who, whilst admiring his early work, "see nothing in" his later and more abstract work, are surely blind to its essential quality. Even at its severest, in the white reliefs whose purity has been called puritanical, there is a sensitivity of line and a play of light and shade which are anything but geometrical or mechanical. In some of the more recent coloured compositions the organization of forms is more geometrical, but that is only, as it were, the counter-

## A Coat of Many Colours

point for a free melody of colour. Now that form has been freed from its representational functions, colour too is released for experimentation. The harmony of the old masters, often daringly anti-natural (even in such an academic artist as Poussin) always has naturalistic limitations : these limitations still linger on in cubism, though freely interchanged (the colours of a guitar, a newspaper and a table may be transposed, but the colours are nevertheless suggested by these objects). But when colour is completely emancipated from naturalism, completely new possibilities emerge. Colour becomes a value in itself, and intensity, saturation or brightness, rather than tonality, is the measure of its value. A composition in tone relations is a reduction of intensities to a common denominator or value : a composition in intensities is an exaltation of individual values to their highest harmony of contrasts. We might even say, to their highest dynamic unity. The colours which in themselves might clash, are balanced and resolved in formal synthesis.

All this implies a very personal estimation of the elements involved. Colour in this sense is an imaginative process, exactly as sound is in music. Perhaps to complete the musical analogy, the picture should have continuous movement, as in certain abstract colour films ; but when I see such films I have always a strong desire to arrest them, to fix them at selected moments. I would therefore prefer to have a static picture and to continue its movement in my own imagination—or, better still, a series of static pictures which I connect in imagination. This is just what Ben Nicholson provides.

An art which deals in concrete non-representational materials, and is not continually redressed by changing functional needs, as is architecture, always runs the danger of stagnation. The artist tends to be satisfied with the intellectual approval which his work earns, and to forget

## Ben Nicholson

that the sensibility which created the work of art was artificially arrested, for that moment and that material (the sensibility *is* like the film, in continuous movement). In a more obvious sense, once an artist—an artist of any kind, poet as well as painter, even a pastrycook—finds his public, there is a great temptation for him to stand still. It is more than a temptation : it is a line of least resistance. For the public, having made its conquest (and in the case of modern painting it is a hard-won battle) feels entitled to a little intellectual peace. It only asks the artist to go on repeating himself—producing exactly the same kind of picture to suit the new extension of sensibility. The history of art is full of these melancholy figures—successful artists, but successful in a particular “line”, who only at the cost of their livelihood dare depart from the line, to experiment, to advance into new territories of sensibility. They are not so much successful artists as successful business men ; they have become part of the “trade”, willing underlings of the dealer and his patrons. But the sign of an independent artist—an artist with at least the potentiality of greatness—is that he refuses to submit to such bullying. Indifferent to wealth, to social success, to the taste of his patrons, he follows the dictates of his own creative impulse, and only on his death-bed makes his last experiment.

Ben Nicholson has more than once shown this disconcerting restlessness, this dissatisfaction with his own achievement, this ever-present desire to use one style as a stepping-stone to the next. The changes are no doubt due to external influences—to the knowledge, that is to say, which he derives from the experiments of his contemporaries ; that, again, is a sign of the potentially great artist. But the more significant changes are physical changes : that is to say, they arise in the course of action, they are dictated by the way materials behave under the artist's hand.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Surface was always an essential quality in Nicholson's painting. In the first phase it was, as usual, a painterly surface: an exploitation of the qualities of paint. Then he played with the idea of a diversity of surface qualities, for which he would bring in the aid of *collage*. But this was too easy a solution; it was an addition to the original surface, not an exploration of that surface. The artist then began to scratch the surface—to treat it, not merely as a *brushed* surface, but also as an *engraved* surface. Thus layers of paint were revealed, one buried below the other. Against the soft rhythm of the brush emerged the hard-bitten rhythm of the scoring point. Actually the pictures were painted with both ends of the brush—the bristles and the sharp wooden point.

But this business of surfaces below surfaces must be explored more thoroughly. Why stop at surfaces indicated by layers of paint? Why not cut out, excavate, the very background of the picture? The flimsy canvas must be abandoned in favour of the wooden panel; but it is not the first time that the surface of the panel has been used in painting. One must, however, keep within the limits of thickness we expect in a picture: otherwise, we have no division between painting and sculpture. Actually, there will be no division between this new kind of painting and bas-relief; but why should there be divisions between the plastic arts? Categories are for historians and critics, not for artists.

So Ben Nicholson began to vary the level of his painted surfaces—to cut out areas of the panel's surface at varying depths. These surfaces at varying depths made the pattern, the composition. The colour was in the depths. One depth against another gave the artist all the play of tonality he needed for his composition. A uniform surface paint of white or grey became the only necessary pigment.

The means, that is to say, became very simple: a counter-

## English Prose

play of areas and depths, revealed against light. Like sculpture, a three-dimensional art. But, unlike sculpture, a three-dimensional art with one face. The composition changes slightly, subtly, as we move across the room. But there is no need to walk round the composition. It is not a composition in mass, but in opposed planes.

The nearest analogy is in architecture: the façade. But not façades for a functional building—that was the baroque fallacy. Façades divorced from function, free façades—that is the briefest possible description of Ben Nicholson's reliefs. They sometimes remind one of the ground-plans of Egyptian temples—no longer vertical façades, but area designs at once logical and sensitive. They need space and light—they cannot have too much light, so long as it is variable in its direction. They are the only kind of paintings that can look the sun in the face.

### 18. *English Prose*

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH's anthology, despite its defects, has now for many years been handed out as the official pattern book of our native prose. There it stands, a structure of a thousand pages; and though in our most leaden doubts we do not wish the thing undone, yet we do feel that it is legitimate to hedge that authoritative security with definitions and qualifications. There are two kinds of anthology: one merely gathers into a bunch the flowers that attract us on our literary way; the method here is private and haphazard. It is not a method to which, in so solemn a concern as an *Oxford Book*, an anthologist would lightly resort; and quite clearly it is not the method to which Sir Arthur has resorted. Apart from this wayward florilegium, there is no alternative but a purposive selection; and when your field is the whole expanse of

## A Coat of Many Colours

English prose (rather than the individual cats and dogs, the gardens and flowers, or other features of that expanse), then that purpose must resolve itself into criticism. Your anthology must be an anthology of what in all good faith you consider to be good prose. And "what you consider" implies not what merely takes your fancy but whatever has a goodness you are prepared to defend by an appeal to critical principles. Sir Arthur frankly abandons this intention. "I have very sedulously included all sorts of our prose, choosing often a passage quite pedestrian." On what principle? Why, like the geologist, unfold every stratum when your business, if you once admit that prose is an art, is to follow the vein of ore? The present anthologist is ready with an answer: for he has made it as clear as possible, in his preface, that it is precisely in following a vein that he has struck so many levels:

I claim here, and with all emphasis, that my book is not one of *specimens*: that a critic will mistake its purpose who starts judging it by the amount of space, the number of extracts, assigned to so-and-so; as that he may likely be mistaken in deeming me ignorant of an author not included or, in his opinion, insufficiently represented as against one of acknowledged importance. . . . The anthologist, as I understand his trade, must have a "notion" of his own, a "pattern in the carpet", though he cannot easily define his pattern.

Sir Arthur then confesses that his purpose has been to make the anthology as "representatively English" as possible.

The first thing to be noted in this apology is that in shifting the emphasis from the word *prose* to the epithet *English* Sir Arthur has surrendered the critical position. I shall presently examine his interpretation of the quality of Englishness; but, in the first place, I must make clear the possibility of that severer task declined by Sir Arthur. The whole difficulty hinges on the definition given to

## English Prose

prose. Sir Arthur begins with one that seems arbitrary and inadequate. It is a development of a distinction made between prose and verse by Arthur Clutton-Brock, who argued that while the cardinal virtue of verse is Love, the cardinal virtue of prose is Justice. Sir Arthur prefers to regard Persuasion rather than Justice as the first virtue of prose, whether in narrative or in argument :

Defoe's art in telling of Crusoe's visits to the wreck is all bent on persuading you that it really happened and *just so* ; as Burke, in pleading for conciliation with the American colonists, is bent on marshalling argument upon argument why conciliation is expedient besides being just. In argument, to be sure, the appeal lies always towards an assumed seat of absolute justice to which even in the Law Courts every plea is addressed ; Persuasion is, after all, as Matthew Arnold says, the only true intellectual process. . . .

But in substituting Persuasion for Justice, and in developing his idea he has quite departed from Clutton-Brock's original intention, which, though it cannot be accepted as ideal, was at any rate more than a definition by function. If we refer to the context we find Clutton-Brock expanding his idea of Justice : " By justice here I do not mean justice only to particular people, or ideas, but a habit of justice in all the processes of thought, a style tranquillized and a form moulded by that habit." It is those little words " form " and " style " that Sir Arthur has relinquished, and by doing so has relinquished all pretensions to a definition of prose, and thereby any criterion that would guide a serious anthologist.

The truth which it seems necessary to affirm is quite simply that prose is an art—a particular form of the art of writing. It may be that there is only one form of the art of writing, and that the qualities which make for style appear indiscriminately in prose and verse. This was the opinion of Remy de Gourmont, and is the critical justifi-



## A Coat of Many Colours

cation of those modern experiments in writing which wilfully discard any structural distinctions between prose and verse. As for this particular question (which is not really irrelevant to our present inquiry, for we have to decide whether certain intermediate types—prose-poems, “purple patches”, and ornate mannered prose generally—have a place in our ideal anthology) another French critic, Albert Thibaudet, has made a useful distinction (in his *Vie de Barrès*), which is subtle enough to characterize whatever subtle difference there may be in the essential forms of prose and verse. “In prose each phrase creates for itself the law of its rhythm, whilst in verse each phrase creates for itself a personal reason for submitting to a law which already existed.” The validity of the distinction depends on our acceptance of the existing law, or rather, as in the organization of society, on the consonance of that law with our intellectual development—its general capacity for adapting itself to new forms of sensibility and intelligence.

The art of writing, whether in prose or in verse, depended, in de Gourmont’s opinion, on a rare union of visual and emotive memory : “Si, à la mémoire visuelle, l’écrivain joint la mémoire émotive, s’il a le pouvoir, en évoquant un spectacle matériel, de se replacer exactement dans l’état émotionnel qui suscita en lui ce spectacle, il possède, même ignorant, tout l’art d’écrire.” This is to say that in the creative act of writing there are two elements—the visual image and the emotions associated with this image. The good writer—the artist, if you like—sees the image clearly, and is driven by the mere emotive charge of the image to find for it a fit mating of words. The image is there, stark, visible and real ; to find the right words, and only the right words, to body forth that image, becomes in the writer an actual passion. The image evokes the words ; or if it fails, if to the visual memory there comes no corresponding emotive or expressive memory, then there is no art. A

## English Prose

good writer must then be silent ; and only the bad writer will accept the approximate expression—the first expression that comes into his head, which is usually a stale expression, for it is always much easier to remember phrases than to evoke words. These memorable phrases press invitingly round the would-be writer ; they are the current coin and counters of verbal intercourse ; and to refuse them, and to deal only in freshly minted coin, is possible only to a few autocrats. But these are the rulers of literature, the creators of style ; and they only should find a place in an anthology of the best prose.

It would perhaps be as well, before we proceed further, to analyse these differences in selected examples. We will take, in the first instance, a passage from the *Oxford Book* ; it is a passage from a modern writer, and here I suspect that the anthologist, not being able to resort to the unanimity of time, too readily accepted the fashionable opinions of his own age :

When, two days previously, the news of the approaching end had been made public, astonished grief had swept over the country. 'It appeared as if some monstrous reversal of the course of nature was about to take place. The vast majority of her subjects had never known a time when Queen Victoria had not been reigning over them. She had become an indissoluble part of their whole scheme of things, and that they were about to lose her appeared a scarcely possible thought. She herself, as she lay blind and silent, seemed to those who watched her to be divested of all thinking—to have glided already, unawares, into oblivion. Yet, perhaps, in the secret chambers of consciousness, she had her thoughts, too. Perhaps her fading mind called up once more the shadows of the past to float before it, and retraced, for the last time, the vanished visions of that long history—passing back and back, through the cloud of years to older and ever older memories. . . .

This is not an altogether bad piece of prose : it is not

## A Coat of Many Colours

sufficiently bad to repel the reader. It has, indeed, attracted a great many. But contrast the passage with the following, from the work of a contemporaneous author not represented in this anthology :

The grainy sand had gone from under his feet. His boots trod again a damp crackling mast, razor-shells, squeaking pebbles, that on the unnumbered pebbles beats, wood sieved by the shipworm, lost Armada. Unwholesome sandflats waited to suck his treading soles, breathing upward sewage breath. He coasted them, walking warily. A porter-bottle stood up, stogged to its waist, in the cakey sand dough. A sentinel : isle of dreadful thirst. Broken hoops on the shore ; at the land a maze of dark cunning nets ; further away chalk-scrawled back-doors and on the higher beach a drying-line with two crucified shirts.

There is evidently a great difference between these two passages, which is not the difference between two kinds of goodness but between one quality and its opposite. The first causes us the less surprise : we are scarcely conscious of the kind of prose we are reading—apart from a certain ironic affectation ; but we are, as a matter of fact, reading a prose densely packed with images and analogies, none of which we actually visualize. “Approaching end”, “astonished grief”, grief sweeping over the country, “monstrous reversal”, “the course of nature”, “to take place”, “vast majority”, “an indissoluble part”, “the scheme of things”, “a scarcely possible thought”, “divested of all thinking”, to glide into oblivion, “the secret chambers”, “fading mind”, “the shadows of the past”, “to float before (her mind)”, “the vanished visions”, “through the cloud of years”—here in eighteen lines are eighteen images or analogies, not one of which is original, not one of which is freshly felt or sincerely evoked, and consequently not one of which evokes in the mind of the reader the definite image it actually portends. Now examine the second passage : there is not a single phrase

## English Prose

which does not evoke—which does not force the mind to evoke—the image it expresses. Art, after all, is a question of effect ; and does anyone give a second thought to the death of Queen Victoria as our author has described it ? But merely to read of Stephen Dedalus walking on the beach is to have come into contact with the vibrating reflex of an actual experience.

There are two kinds of prose ; they are, I think, the only two possible kinds of prose, and one is good prose, the other bad prose. I do not pretend that the solidity of what I am calling good prose is always possible to sustain, or, indeed, necessary to sustain. We must admit a prose of expediency ; counters are legitimate as tokens of exchange when what we want is not truth, or beauty, but the vague generalizations that suffice us for the ordinary business of life. But the prose of expediency is not the prose of art ; and even exact utilitarian or scientific prose is only good prose to the degree in which it is salted with vital imagery and an emotional content.

The unit of good prose is either the image or the idiom. Good prose is a mosaic of these units arranged with some regard for rhythm, which is a physical quality, ensuring ease. The image is the closest verbal counterpart of the thing seen : a clean word, fitting closely like a glove, a word with no ragged edges of vagueness or indecision. Such words are placed in some illuminating relationship one with another : they may be in simple metaphorical juxtaposition, as in “ razor-shells ”, or in more deliberate, analogical forms, as in “ crucified shirts ”. In both these examples, however, there is an effect of compression which perhaps complicates the issue. Good prose in a more normal form is more direct, less metaphorical, and depends not so much on new analogies as on stark visualization. The image is evoked by the bare relation. And it is this kind of prose that is most permanent in its appeal, since it

## A Coat of Many Colours

involves almost no element of fancy and therefore no element of fashion. The following description of the murder of Thomas à Becket from Caxton's edition of the *Golden Legend* does not contain a single metaphor :

Then one of the knights smote him as he kneeled before the altar on the head. And one Sir Edward Grim, that was his crossier, put forth his arm with the cross to bear off the stroke, and the stroke smote the cross asunder and his arm almost off, wherefore he fled for fear, and so did all the monks, that were that time at compline. And then smote each at him, that they smote off a great piece of the skull of his head, that his brain fell on the pavement. And so they slew and martyred him, and were so cruel that one of them brake the point of his sword against the pavement. And thus this holy and blessed Archbishop S. Thomas suffered death in his own church for the right of all holy church. And when he was dead they stirred his brain, and after went into his chamber and took away his goods, and his horse out of his stable, and took away his bulls and his writings, and delivered them to Sir Robert Broke to bear into France to the king. And as they searched his chamber they found in his chest two shirts of hair made full of great knots, and then they said : Certainly he was a good man ; and coming down into the churchyard they began to dread and fear that the ground would not have borne them, and were marvellously aghast, but they supposed that the earth would have swallowed them all quick. And then they knew that they had done amiss. And anon it was known all about, how that he was martyred, and anon after they took his holy body, and unclothed him, and found bishop's clothing above, and the habit of a monk under. And next his flesh he wore hard hair, full of knots, which was his shirt. And his breech was of the same, and the knots sticked fast within the skin, and all his body full of worms ; he suffered great pain.

It may possibly be objected that such prose is too violent : that it gets its effect by the uninspired record of crude horror. It is more likely that our sense of horror, if it

## English Prose

actually exists, is the qualm of a too acute sensibility. This was certainly not a violent prose for the fifteenth century. And apart from the question of a different sensibility, is there really any difference of technique, of art, in so typically modern a passage as this ? :

Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor-car had stopped outside Mulberry's shop window ; old ladies on the tops of omnibuses spread their black parasols ; here a green, here a red parasol opened with a little pop. Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Everyone looked at the motor-car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor-car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at ; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose ? But for what purpose ?

Images are the rudiments of a literary art, but, as these passages show, there is another element. An aggregation of fresh images would not of itself constitute a prose style ; it would be a rocky, glittering material, too graceless and uneven for the mind's absorption. This other quality which is added to the moments of imagery has for its unit the idiom. An idiom is literally a way of expression peculiar to a person or a language. But we sometimes talk of the *genius* of a language, so possibly the word " idiom " might be reserved for the more restricted aspect of the question. An idiom then becomes the unit of style ;

## A Coat of Many Colours

it is the outcome of those hereditary and environmental influences which determine in any man his individual predilections and fancies. It is an index to his personality. As the events were received into each individual mould of sensibility, so the cast of those events which we evoke in writing emerges with all the sutures of this mould.' Idiom is the sum of those influences which determine, not only our choice of words, but also their arrangement in a personally appealing rhythm. It is the expression in words of what Remy de Gourmont called the emotive memory ; it is the element which, joined to a visual memory, determines style.

But the invention, or rather the evolution, of an idiom operates in two ways ; it is either personal, a part of the individual and adapted to his sense of things : or it is the idiom of a tradition. In the latter case the individual almost suppresses his personality and submits to a common rule. We can apply to these two kinds of idiom a distinction similar to that made by M. Thibaudet between prose and verse : the personal idiom is its own law and exists for its own sake ; the impersonal idiom seeks to identify itself with the general idiom of contemporary speech. Sir Thomas Browne is a typical example of the creator of a personal idiom, as, among modern writers, is Henry James. Defoe and W. H. Hudson serve as examples of the acceptance of a common standard. It is tempting at first to imagine that the two types of idiom react on one another : that the slowly evolving consensus of national idiom is accelerated or inspired by the outstanding accents of a great personal idiom ; and that a personal idiom is but a variation on the characteristic excellences of the national idiom. But, in fact, the eccentrics seem to mount their lonely towers without to any sensible extent deflecting the common trend. The truth is, perhaps, that only a weak-minded or characterless writer would condescend to imi-

## English Prose

tate, or even to be influenced by, anything so little his own as the personal idiom of another writer. And fame has a very summary fashion of dispensing with such reflected graces. But to adopt a common discipline is a different affair, especially since the discipline is not to be learnt by any mechanical paces but must be in the nature of an intuition into the essence of things.

Before passing on to consider the essence of our native idiom it would be well to make one qualification: the assumption of a discipline need not, and perhaps must not, destroy the capacity for a private or licensed style. In the best writers we may look with confidence for both; and it would be a sorry critic who sacrificed *The Journal to Stella* for the sake of his categories. But there is no need; and the good sense that a writer shows in his perfected style is generally evidence of the humanity that we shall find in his journal or letters. As a basis, in every genuine writer, there is his intimate talk or self-communion; it is merely a question of psychological disposition whether you seek a direct aggrandizement of that intimacy by an exaggerated exposure of it in writing, or whether you shrink from that personal exposure and manifest your impulse to expression in the accepted terms of your own age.

With the definition of image and idiom we have not quite completed the analysis of good prose: there is another element which we must call *ordonnance*. Idiom has given us a unity, but it is the unity of a material. To complete the process of perfect writing there must also be structure. Structure, it would seem, is the product of logical thought, whether exercised in argument or in narrative. It implies progression; and good prose is never for long or consistently good without this element of progress. Good prose must have a pace: it must step like a well-bred horse: each word must strike with clean precision and must advance with a continuous rhythm. It is this princi-



## A Coat of Many Colours

ple that brings in doubt the stray purple passage, the disjointed prose poem, and the excerpt generally. These can have all the qualities of good imagery and good idiom, but without *ordonnance* they are ruins rather than buildings, and a prose anthology can only be justified with this limitation in mind.

Image, idiom, *ordonnance*—is that all? Not quite. “Images, however faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only so far as they are modified by a predominant passion, or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion.” These words of Coleridge’s strike to a deeper reality than any we have so far considered; and to them we might add these equally significant words of Henry James’s: “There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer.”

In great prose, as in great poetry, a fine sensibility is not enough. The quality of a mind, its predominating passion, is often difficult enough to define. Who would venture confidently to define Swift’s, or Newman’s, or Emily Brontë’s? Yet these are among the greatest masters of our prose, and among those most evidently dominated by a great passion. But among their more discernible qualities—it is also a passion—is one we describe as English: “A sense of wonderful history written silently in books and buildings, all persuading that we are heirs of more spiritual wealth than, maybe, we have surmised or hitherto begun to divine.” So this “subdued and hallowed emotion” is designated by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch; and in default of a critical intention, this is the sanction he has sought for his labours as an anthologist. It would have been a

## English Prose

graceful amend, at the conclusion of this review, to have acknowledged his success in this venture ; but I am too conscious of a quality in the true tradition of English life and literature to be sure of its presence in this anthology. There is a spirit that runs through all our great writers, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, from Jonson to Swift, from Sterne to . . . we do not know whether it will yet revive. But it is a spirit antithetical to the spirit so fully represented by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, which is the spirit of Puritanism and Quietism, of subjective joys and passive aspirations. There is, over against this spirit, sometimes woven in with it, but essentially a part of our national heritage, the spirit of open candour and of active enjoyment, the life of deeds and of zest in the sensuous quality of our flesh. Not the dreamy sensuousness of the South, but the gross *gaillardise* of the North. It might be objected that in its gross state this is not fit matter for literature, though Sir John Falstaff and the Wife of Bath are there to disprove it. But this spirit can be elevated into wit and gaiety ; and though Sir Arthur has given us a fair specimen of Sterne, he leaves us aghast at the total omission of Congreve—in whom not only does this spirit attain its highest sublimation but in whom also the English tongue attains its subtlest levity of diction and fine force of aptitude. Other writers, Dryden and Berkeley, Swift and Landor, support the tradition of our national prose ; only writers like Congreve and Sterne can be said to adorn it.

### 19. *Henri Rousseau*

IT is a hundred years since Henri Rousseau was born, and this man who lived all his life in poverty, and received little but ridicule from his contemporaries, is now honoured as one of the great masters of the nineteenth century. His

## A Coat of Many Colours

paintings are beyond the reach of all but American museums and international millionaires, and he could have lived in comfort all his days on the price which a single canvas would now fetch in the art market. It is a familiar story, and there is no special moral to be drawn from it. No conceivable form of patronage would have been kinder to Rousseau. He worked as a minor official in the customs for about twenty years and then retired on a tiny pension and painted to his heart's content for another twenty-five years. There may be modern states which would give such an artist a somewhat better pension, but only on condition that he conformed to some recognized standard or style. Rousseau was condemned to poverty, but at least he was free to realize his own vision. He was free, too, to play his violin and give musical evenings in his studio (which was also his living-room and bedroom). He seems to have been a happy man.

One or two misconceptions about this great artist are not yet dispelled. He is sometimes called an amateur, or a "Sunday painter". It is implied that his painting was a hobby. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Rousseau always described himself as *artiste-peintre*, which means a professional painter. It was his ambition to become an academician, to rival the perfect "finish" of Bouguereau or Courtois, to be accepted (as he might have said) in the best circles. When he saw the Cézanne memorial exhibition in 1907 he was distressed. "I could have finished these paintings for him," he said.

Rousseau does not belong to "the modern movement", though he has no doubt had an influence on painters who do—even on Picasso and Braque. There has been much talk of his *naïveté*, but the word is misleading if it implies anything childish or incompetent. Rousseau was not even spontaneous: he was a hard worker, a meticulous craftsman. "I have been told that my work is not of this

## Henri Rousseau

century," he wrote in a letter to the art critic, André Dupont, in 1910. "As you will understand, I cannot now change my manner which I have acquired as the result of obstinate toil. . . ." I would rather call Rousseau a *natural* painter. His nearest affinities are with folk-art—with the glass-paintings, illustrated chap-books, painted pottery which represent the natural expression of untaught people throughout Europe. This is not, properly speaking, a "tradition". It is a common language, with common characteristics. It develops organically from the basic sensibilities and laws of perception of the human being. It is a basic visual speech. Before an organized system of education interfered with its natural growth, "child" art matured into "folk" art. Folk-art is merely child-art which has become adult. It becomes adult by becoming more objective—children below a certain age (12-14) are wholly subjective: they paint symbols to express their inner emotional or sensational being. When social pressures of various sorts and a maturing physique compel them to observe the objective world, a decisive struggle takes place. The mind may become wholly a slave to the objective world, and then the personality, as a unique sensitive organism, dies—the poet and the artist dies in man. Education has been generally speaking a system for perfecting this process of objectification. Rousseau was one of the exceptional people who escaped this process. His mind did not become conventionalized. At the same time, he did not remain a child, wholly confined to a subjective world. He became an adult, like any peasant. But instead of becoming a peasant-carpenter or a peasant-weaver, he became a peasant-painter. Of course, it is improper to describe a Paris customs-official as a peasant; but we can hardly call Henri Rousseau a proletarian or even a petit-bourgeois. He was what the sociologists call a "marginal" man.

## A Coat of Many Colours

This marginal man worked hard to become what he himself called "one of our best realist painters". In an autobiographical sketch which he prepared for a dictionary of painters, he wrote :

He has perfected himself more and more in the original manner which he adopted and he is in the process of becoming one of our best realist painters. As a characteristic mark he wears a bushy beard. He has been a member of the Independents for many years, believing that complete freedom of production should be given to any initiator whose mind aspires to the Beautiful and the Good.<sup>1</sup>

Whether what Rousseau meant by "realism" corresponds to the generally accepted meaning of the word is doubtful. Certainly he was not a naturalistic painter, intent on reproducing the exact image recorded by his visual perception of the outer world. He made a deliberate study of nature, but so does Picasso or Henry Moore, or any genuine artist who would not normally describe himself as a realist. It would be more logical, perhaps, to call an artist who confessedly "aspires to the Beautiful and the Good" an idealist. It has been said that the tropical jungles and exotic landscapes which Rousseau painted were not reminiscences of the four years he spent in Mexico as a regimental musician, but that he made accurate studies of the vegetation in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. But a Chicago professor, who has studied photographs of several pictures, reports that "the plants are conventionalized and most of them are difficult to identify". It is only about a bunch of bananas that he feels any certainty.<sup>2</sup> Rousseau, in fact, was faithful to the basic forms of nature,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from R. H. Wilenski's *Modern French Painting*, which gives the best account at present available of Rousseau's career. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, has more recently published a well-illustrated monograph by Daniel Catton Rich which is fully documented and contains an excellent bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

## Henri Rousseau

but these forms he took and varied and recombined in accordance with the laws of his æsthetic sensibility. The form and organization of the picture was the determining factor. And that form was "initiated" by the artist's imagination, and in the realization of the form imagined, the artist claimed "complete freedom".

Rousseau's achievement is primarily something to be enjoyed—simply and sensuously and by as many people as possible. But it is possible, without being too priggish, to point out "the significance of Rousseau". If what I have said above is true, he is essentially a people's painter, in a sense in which one would never apply that condescending phrase to Cézanne or Picasso. But it is not likely that the people to-day would accept and like Rousseau's paintings; they would probably feel that they were being "got at" in some way, as did the people of Paris fifty years ago. They might accept the flower-pieces and some of the landscapes, but they would demand more verisimilitude in the portraits and would recoil from the superreal magic of "The Sleeping Gypsy" or "The Hunter". And what would a crowd at Wembley make of "Les Joueurs de Football"? But it is the people that is sick—sick with sophistication and conventionality, their sensibilities atrophied and their imaginations dead. This state of mental sickness in the people is due to causes which Rousseau miraculously escaped: to a social consciousness which suppresses spontaneity in the individual, to an educational system which kills the sensibility of children, to deadening labours and devitalized environment. Rousseau may not be a great artist, in the sense in which we recognize Raphael or Rembrandt or Picasso as great artists. I would not, however, so easily admit that he is not a great artist in the sense in which we recognize Giotto, or the great Byzantine mosaicists, or the great Chinese artists as "great". But he is greatly significant

## A Coat of Many Colours

in that he measures very exactly the dividedness of our civilization, our schismatic culture. A true culture is indivisible. Art, in a true culture, emerges like spring water on every hillside. Rousseau was an oasis in our desert.

### 20. *The Faculty of Abstraction*

ALL who have given any careful or consistent thought to the subject of so-called abstract or non-objective art know that it leads to problems of psychology and philosophy of the subtlest difficulty. These problems cannot be discussed in the normal course of art criticism, because in general they depend on the use of a philosophical terminology with which the general public cannot be expected to be familiar. The present essay, while not pretending to treat the subject in a manner satisfactory to the professional philosopher, will carry art criticism on to a plane which it generally avoids in this country. Indeed, I would say that the discussion of this subject, abstract art, has reached a condition of deadlock which can only be liberated by the use of ampler philosophical terms.

We must begin with certain assumptions about the development of consciousness in mankind. There is no space for a critical review of the various theories which have been advanced by anthropologists and psychologists, but I would venture to say that there is a general agreement on certain broad lines which will suffice for our present purpose. What we now know as intellection or abstract reasoning is peculiar to man, and only becomes evident in man at a relatively late stage of evolution. That reasoning of a kind takes place even in animals is not to be denied, but such reasoning is always particular and concrete.

It seems as evident to me [wrote Locke] that they do, some of them, in certain instances, reason, as that they

## The Faculty of Abstraction

have sense, but it is only in particular ideas, just as they received them from their senses. They are, the best of them, tied up within these narrow bounds, and have not (as I think) the faculty to enlarge them by any kind of abstraction.<sup>1</sup>

This subject, as I have already warned the reader, bristles with all the classical problems of philosophy, and it is only by the nimble use of certain stepping-stones that we shall avoid getting bogged. Those stepping-stones are of a solid materialistic or empirical nature, but I cannot stop to describe them. But in brief the theory I would support regards this faculty of abstraction as due to progressive stages in the use of classification. Man, as an animal, is presented through his senses with a mass of phenomena. Merely to carry on the business of life, to exist, he is compelled to arrange these phenomena in a certain order. At first that order will be determined by affective (emotional) reactions, and such is the classification of phenomena we find in primitive man. Everything at this stage of development is fused into one view, and superstition and fear dominate existence. Phenomena which we as civilized human beings regard as discrete—and if connected, connected by explicable links—are for the primitive mind inextricably interpenetrated. Lévy-Bruhl has called this state of mind in the primitive “collective representation”.

Their mental activity [he says] is too little differentiated for it to be possible to consider ideas or images of objects by themselves apart from the emotions and passions which evoke these ideas or are evoked by them. Just because our mental activity is more differentiated, and we are more accustomed to analysing its functions, it is difficult for us to realize by any effort of imagination, more complex states in which emotional or motor elements are *integral parts* of the representation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Ch. XI, s. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *How Natives Think*, p. 36.



## A Coat of Many Colours

The evolution of reasoning we may regard as the progressive attempt to divorce this emotional element from the process of representation. Over a long period of trial and error, and ever driven on by the necessities of combating natural forces (the so-called struggle for existence) mankind was led to make, first a utilitarian or technical classification of phenomena, and then, as the need for connecting or explaining such a pragmatic classification became apparent, a conceptual or scientific classification. We have to imagine mankind as first forming a vast structure of pigeon-holes, into which he sorted the confusing mass of phenomena presented by his senses ; then as giving to the contents of each pigeon-hole a general name or "concept" by means of which he could refer to the contents. This name or concept is, in effect, a symbol which saves us the trouble of doing the sorting and pigeon-holing every time we want to speak about or think about the phenomena in question. We must leave aside the very interesting problem of why a particular word should become the symbol representing a particular set of phenomena.

The further, and final, stage of development comes when man acquires the ability to manipulate these symbols or concepts without reference back to the actual objects or phenomena which they denote. He "reasons" with the symbols as abstractions. In mathematical reasoning this is obviously true, but dialectical or metaphysical reasoning is no less abstract. To see how extensively and with what almost dizzy prestidigitation this can be done one has only to look at the metaphysical systems of German philosophers like Kant and Hegel—systems which, long after they have been discredited as true deductions from experience, will be admired as abstract works of art.

This process of development so briefly and inadequately described must now be related to the parallel development

## The Faculty of Abstraction

of art. Art begins, so far as we can trace its beginnings in the Old Stone Age, with the reproduction of eidetic images—that is to say, of images of objects (actually almost invariably animals) which for mystical or emotional reasons have been vividly impressed on the memory of the artist. Art begins as a purely affective or emotive activity, and as such it remains in the most primitive types of mankind still existing (the Bushmen of South Africa, for example). It begins to change when, with the growth of classification, man requires a symbol to express a particular group of phenomena. We have already seen how a word or concept may be chosen to express such a group of phenomena. But alternatively a sign or graphic symbol may be selected. At first such a sign or symbol will be based on the vividness of the eidetic imagery in the mind of the artist, but in time the sign will be reproduced with increasing carelessness, with less and less reference to the memory of actual phenomena, and eventually will become divorced from reality. In this way most alphabets arose and developed, and in some of them we may still find traces of their pictorial origins.

In my book, *Art and Society*, I have argued that such symbolic art, gradually divorced from immediate imagery and from the emotional associations of the object, inevitably loses its vitality and declines. I will not repeat the overwhelming evidence which the history of art offers in support of this contention. I think it would be well to note here, however, an apparent exception, best represented in Byzantine art. I should be the last to deny the supreme æsthetic appeal of certain symbolic representations of Christ or the Madonna which we find in the mosaics and illuminated manuscripts of this period. But here I would contend that the artist was in no sense using a symbol as the representative of a generic concept. He was actually trying to represent, with all the emotional awe which such

## A Coat of Many Colours

a daring attempt implied, the superhuman form and features of the godhead. We have only to observe how the representation of the Madonna degenerates at the hands of a more rational or more commercial type of artist to have this truth confirmed.

With the growth of rationality and a logical type of mind, art tended to become more and more differentiated as an activity. It was no longer, as in primitive times, an activity integral with life itself—as accepted and as natural as any other practical activity. It became a specialized activity, appealing only to a minority. In the same way, reasoning or intellectual activity developed apart from the normal life of mankind, and became a specialized activity appealing to a minority. By the nineteenth century it was possible for a philosopher like Hegel to regard art and intellect as two distinct and incompatible elements in human life ; and as an intellectual, an exponent of the idea, to treat art as an obsolescent feature of life. And from his particular point of view, Hegel was right. This incompatibility between art and intellect does exist ; art cannot become conceptual, an affair of symbols, an activity conducted without relation to objects. Art is always a perceptual activity, an activity of the senses in relation to plastic materials.

That is to say, art must now as ever rely on what Lévy-Bruhl calls “ the law of participation ”. For the artist as for primitive man there always exists a “ mystic community of substance ”, a “ pre-logical ” identification of thought and object, of concept and percept. But this does not imply that the artist must revert to the primitive stage of mentality. The identification which is now required of him lies beyond the concept. That is to say, he must now reclothe the concept in visible and vital raiment. He must accept the orderly universe of philosophy, the pigeon-holes of science. But he must make them real and vivid. In

## The Faculty of Abstraction

the place of the single concept, he must now put the single phenomenon, the work of art.

I do not pretend that there is any one way of doing this. It seems to me, on the contrary, that we are at a stage of experimentation, trying in various ways to discover a new law of identification. I believe that surrealism, no less than abstract art, is engaged on this all-absorbing and all-important task.

The surrealist believes, or acts as if he believed, that parallel to the development of a *conscious* method of reasoning, there has taken place, below the conscious level of the mind, an organization of latent perceptions (images), and that what is required of the artist is the materialization of this unconscious activity. He would argue that consciousness, intellection and reasoning generally have not developed without unconscious compensations; that against the transcendental edifices of a Kant or a Hegel we must balance the subliminal fantasies of a Lautréamont or a Picasso—just as, in another age, the theological system of a Thomas Aquinas was balanced by the imaginative structure of the Gothic cathedral. The only problem is to discover methods of circumventing the intellect—of releasing the compensatory images of the unconscious in plastic and poetic form.

The method of the abstract artist is more direct. His aim is, in effect, to construct a plastic object appealing immediately to the senses and in no way departing from the affective basis of art, which shall nevertheless be the plastic equivalent of the concept—or, to use the dialectical term, its antithesis. Indeed, we may go further and say that he accepts the position of absolute opposition between art and idea declared by Hegel; and proceeds to resolve the contradiction by creating the synthesis—the work of art which translates the concept back again into perceptual form, while retaining the unity of the original concept.

## A Coat of Many Colours

' "Space", for example, is a typical concept. As a concept it is very evident in the work of a surrealist painter like Dali; Dali contradicts the rational concept of space in a fantastic manner, giving to his pictures what we might call "a dream perspective". But this very contradiction of space makes us vividly aware of its reality. An abstract artist like Mondrian attacks the same concept frontally. He presents us with a bare arrangement of lines and two or three pure colours which create and affirm the concept "space" in the most direct and unequivocal manner. The purer and more fundamental the elements which are used, the acuter and purer is our *emotional* awareness of "space". The very fact that naturalistic motives are excluded, and that a naturalistic quality like shading is not imitated, makes our physical awareness of the concept more direct, more exact.

I do not suggest that all concepts can be treated in this manner. The word "dog" is a concept. If we picture a dog, it is always a particular breed of a dog, and perhaps only a surrealist could paint a conceptual dog, or give an adequate plastic equivalent of all that is implied when we use the symbolic word "dog", but actually we do not need such a plastic equivalent; it would, as we say, serve no useful purpose. The activity which modern art is engaged on, of translating concepts into plastic percepts (plastic objects which can be perceived), is determined by necessity—the necessity of our social evolution. At any stage in history (since the appearance of human consciousness) certain concepts are created or preferred, which concepts form the typical ideology of a period. If we are dialectical materialists we regard them as the reflection of that particular stage of economic development. But essential to the creative life and development of each period is the translation of these concepts into objects of æsthetic contemplation. The Greek temple, the Gothic cathedral,

## The Faculty of Abstraction

the Renaissance palace, are but the major types of such translations. To-day we are in the process of creating such another type in architecture. But subordinate to these major types are thousands of minor types, all illustrating the ideological concepts of each period. The difference in our own period is that we have become more conscious of these historical processes, *and can attack directly what other ages could only discover accidentally*. Just as surrealism makes use of, or rather proceeds on the assumption of, the knowledge embodied in psycho-analysis, so abstract art makes use of, or proceeds on the basis of, the abstract concepts of physics and dynamics, geometry and mathematics. It is not necessary for the abstract artist to have a knowledge of these sciences (nor is it necessary for the surrealist to have a knowledge of psycho-analysis); such concepts are part of our mental ambience, and the artist is precisely the individual who can make this ambience actual. He can make it actual in detached and non-utilitarian works of art; or he can make it actual in architecture and the industrial arts. In either case he is serving the highest interests of humanity, which is never to halt in a genetic deadlock, never to revert to an easier path, never to acknowledge defeat when confronted with a contradiction; but ever to negate the negation, to proceed to fresh synthesis, to new paths, to whatever new awareness his evolving consciousness shall lead.

### 21. *The Last of the Bohemians*

PAUL VERLAINE is often given this title, but a comparative study of the lives of many poets before and after his time might reveal that he had little claim to any such distinction. What we agree to call Verlaine's *failings* are the general characteristics of a certain kind of temperament,

## A Coat of Many Colours

and though various accidental circumstances give local or temporal colour to Verlaine's actual existence (congenital syphilis and the accessibility of absinthe being the most important) there is no reason to suppose that in essentials he was very different from a poet like Baudelaire who came before him or (to take someone who is safely dead) a poet like Essenin who came after him. Verlaine himself was of this opinion, and called such chosen spirits Saturnians :

Or ceux-là qui sont nés sous le signe SATURNE,  
Fauve planète, chère aux nécromanciens,  
Ont entre tous, d'après les grimoires anciens,  
Bonne part de malheur et bonne part de bile.  
L'Imagination, inquiète et débile,  
Vient rendre nul en eux l'effort de la Raison.  
Dans leurs veines, le sang, subtil comme un poison,  
Brûlant comme une lave, et rare, coule et roule  
En grésillant leur triste Idéal qui s'écroule.

Such Saturnians, Verlaine concludes, must suffer and die according to the predetermined logic of an evil influence. This is, of course, a melodramatic interpretation of the psychological facts ; and Verlaine, who could be realistic about himself, knew these facts.

Unless a biographer reveals his standards of criticism, I cannot trust him in his presentation of facts. He may claim that he has given us all the facts and nothing but the facts, but that is absurd, for no one can know all the facts of a man's life, and anything less than everything is a distortion unless controlled by an acute sensibility. In this case it should be a poetic sensibility. I would not trust a critic who dismisses Rimbaud as an "inspired charlatan" and admits that he is baffled by just that aspect of Rimbaud's poetry which has most appealed to his successors. A lack of sympathy for Rimbaud's work inevitably leads to a certain prejudice against his character. There are no standards by which I would care to defend that character,

## The Last of the Bohemians

but if a youth at the age of seventeen has produced some of the most absolute poetry ever written by a human being, I am more interested in that fact than in his moral conduct. A poet's poems are facts far more essential in his life than his sexual adventures or his financial difficulties, and the biography of a poet should therefore be primarily an account of his creative activity, *the life of his muse*, and the other facts are only important in so far as they contribute to an understanding of this process.

In one of his letters Verlaine said : " I lack judgement, despite all my good sense. I don't at all like the moral to be drawn from this because it stinks of pseudo-physiology : I am a feminine—which would explain a lot of things." That confession is the clue to his personality—and to the personality of all genuine poets. Verlaine is merely claiming that quality which Keats called " negative capability "—" that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason ". How exactly Verlaine affirms this quality in his " Art Poétique " :

De la musique avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

Il faut aussi que tu n'aïlles point  
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise :  
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise  
Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint.

It by no means follows that this vicariousness of the poet's spirit necessarily leads to the moral depravity of Verlaine's life. It is largely a matter of chance. Up to his meeting with Rimbaud, Verlaine had not shown anything but aimiable weaknesses ; he was, in fact, a good little bourgeois clerk who had just contracted a marriage with a very decent woman of his own class, and though it is probable



## A Coat of Many Colours

that his inherited disease would finally have driven him to drink, there is no reason to suppose that he would have ever become an active homosexual.

Towards the end of his life, when his fame had spread beyond the narrow circle of the intelligentsia, Verlaine was allowed a certain licence ; the police were told to let him get drunk with impunity, and when he could no longer support himself he was taken into the public hospital, where he was treated with a certain consideration. When he died the Ministry of Education sent 500 francs towards the funeral expenses. But neither this belated recognition, nor the eulogies which were pronounced over his grave by his distinguished contemporaries, can disguise the misery of his existence. "Tels les Saturniens doivent souffrir et tels mourir . . ." He would not have us moralize on his life. But we must insist that the quality of his poetry is the quality of the man, and the poetry is immortal. Poets need not take that fact as a positive invitation to lead the same kind of life as Verlaine, but at least it might suggest to us all that poetry is a mystery which does not enter into the narrow categories of our morality and reason.

### 22. *Art and Autarky*

ART is a product of autarky—that seems to be the lesson of history, and if in the future we wish to recreate those political and economic conditions which make for a natural and spontaneous culture, it seems that we should aim at the division of the world into relatively small and almost wholly self-sufficient units. From a cultural point of view I do not think it can be established that these units must necessarily be national—certainly not, as Hitler has argued, racial. The fundamental link is that between art and work, people and the soil. There must be peace, stability,

## Art and Autarky

even—as the Chinese philosophers taught—passivity. But how will that be possible in a world shrinking under a network of high-speed communications? It may not be possible—we may be leaving an epoch without taste to enter an epoch without art. But there may be another possibility. One cannot meditate too often on the profound fable of the hare and the tortoise. It may be that as the speed of travel increases, we shall grow less aware of its effects. To fly above the clouds is less of an “experience” than to be carried through towns and fields: it is extremely boring and “empty”, at any rate for the passenger. Meanwhile, under the air and between the autostradi the country grows deserted. The grass grows between the stones in the by-passed village as it has never done since the eighteenth century. And where the grass grows a culture is possible.

### 23. Coleridge

THERE is a good case for regarding Coleridge as *potentially* the greatest intellect, certainly of his own time, that England has produced in the allied realms of poetry and philosophy; and yet his life was a tragic failure, and his work a vast chaos. When we consider the psychological problem which he presents, the conviction grows that it was in some way connected with his garrulity. A man who talks so much will never write well or consistently. An endless flow of speech dissipates that energy which is required for the concentrated act of writing. For a good writer writes, in a very literal sense, with the tip of his pen. Through that narrow channel thoughts flow from the brain in an ordered sequence. If, however, they have been previously divulged in conversation, the pressure falls, the pen falters. Thoughts spoken are like glowing coals that turn to ashes when scattered in the wind.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 24. *Vulgarity*

THE antithesis of Beauty is Ugliness, but if art, as I have consistently maintained, is a wider concept than beauty, and may even include ugliness, it is only proper to ask what is then art's antithesis. Obviously, I think, it is vulgarity. Vulgarity, as Oscar Wilde said (or ought to have said), is the only sin. The opposite point of view is taken by George Robey, who confessed in his reminiscences (*Looking Back on Life*): "I believe in honest vulgarity. So did Shakespeare—and if he didn't know what was what nobody on earth ever did. . . . Honest vulgarity is the finest antidote I know to present-day hypocrisy." So apparently it is not a simple matter; vulgarity is not a merely negative affair. There is honest vulgarity, and there is another kind of vulgarity, presumably dishonest. And honest vulgarity consists in knowing, like Shakespeare, what is what. Perhaps a consideration of the subject from the point of view of the plastic arts will enlighten us.

Vulgarity in its original sense means the taste of the vulgus, the common or uneducated mass of people. But there is good taste and bad taste, and that the taste of the common people is not always bad taste is proved by all kinds of folk-art, which are generally not only in good taste, but in certain periods far superior to the debased products of cultured taste. Vulgarity, therefore, cannot be made a class distinction; it is bad taste in any grade of society, and I doubt if any period of history has been free from it. But mercifully most vulgar art perishes, though perhaps there might be something to be said for preserving specimens of it in some Museum of Horrors, in which everyone engaged in the production of objects of use and ornament would be compelled to spend a penitential (or propædæutic) period. Actually such a museum exists, or did exist, at Stuttgart in Germany; it was only

## Vulgarity

one section of the Museum, and the choice of objects was not faultless (there were more appropriate ones in the other sections of the Museum). But ash-trays in the shape of water-closets, toilet-rolls printed with patriotic mottoes, beer-mugs in the shape of Bismarck (or Hindenburg) were some of the more memorable exhibits.

Inappropriateness is perhaps the basis of our objection to this kind of vulgarity. Psychologically I think we should find that the motives behind such types of expression have much in common with the motives behind laughter. Vulgarity is often desperately serious, but some of the theories used to explain laughter could be adapted to vulgarity. Vulgarity is, like humour, a convenient method of draining off superfluous energy; "contrast" and "incongruity" are characteristics of its mode of operation, and psychological explanations of humour which lay emphasis on the elements of superiority, contempt or hostility could find ample support in vulgar objects. That a sexual tendency is present is shown, not only in the usual type of music-hall "vulgar joke", but in many of the specimens of so-called works of art assembled in the Stuttgart museum. Perhaps this amounts to no more than saying that vulgarity is often humorous, but actually some general psychological theory can be found which would explain all these departures from human dignity.

But vulgarity, and the laughter it involves, has its social value, as Mr. Robey realizes. As he says, it is the finest antidote to hypocrisy. But that is "honest" vulgarity, or shall we say vulgarity justified by the abuses it corrects. There remains dishonest vulgarity, and I think we shall find that this is simply vulgarity badly presented. Even on the music-hall stage, we prefer vulgarity to be expressed by an artist, and a joke made by George Robey is not quite the same when it is made by someone else. And though Ruskin thought that this quality had rendered

## A Coat of Many Colours

“some of quite the greatest, wisest, and most moral of English writers now almost useless for our youth”, no one nowadays would condemn Chaucer or Shakespeare for their vulgarity. Vulgar they certainly are on occasions, but with such vigour and artistry that anyone not wholly inhuman accepts the matter for the sake of the manner. It is possible that there are certain grades of vulgarity which no artistry could redeem, but perhaps the ideas they express could never by any chance enter a sensitive mind. Most of us are compelled almost daily to wait and stare at hoardings covered with advertisements, ninety per cent. of which are frankly and even obscenely vulgar ; but if one asks oneself, could a good artist render the same idea in an acceptable manner, I think in most cases one has to confess that he could. Why, in spite of that, advertisement agents go out of their way to find artists who are so excessively crude that they must be quite rare, is one of the mysteries of the commercial age. Like film producers and theatrical managers, they must be actuated by false and fantastic notions of what the public wants. Some of the larger advertising agencies should be able to test the matter statistically, but it is not sufficient to compare what they would call high-brow advertisements with the vulgar and undoubtedly effective ones. What we need is a comparison of vulgarity well done and vulgarity badly done. The results might surprise the wiseacres of the advertising world.

We may conclude, then, that vulgarity is synonymous with bad taste, and that it is an affair of the sensibility. We are vulgar, not because of what we say, but because of our manner of saying it. It is a mode of expression, determined by the sensitiveness of our feelings. Whether we wear a loud tie, or speak in a loud voice, or with a bad accent ; whether we make rude noises when eating or complete our toilet in public ; whether we have cushions of screaming satin (complete with tassels) or receiving-sets in

## Shelley

the shape of cathedrals—it is always a failure in sensibility. Whether a fine sensibility is inherited or acquired is another question ; but granted a modicum of it, it seems educable. The unfortunate fact is that it rarely accompanies whatever other qualities make for success in the modern world.

### 25. *Shelley*

THE truest thing ever said about Shelley was said by his wife, Mary. “Shelley,” she wrote on a note on *The Revolt of Islam*, “possessed two remarkable qualities of intellect—a brilliant imagination, and a logical exactness of reason.” Imagination and reason—people are accustomed to regard these two faculties as in some sense contradictory, and for more than a hundred years there has been a tendency to exalt, or deplore, Shelley’s imaginative gifts to the neglect of his metaphysics. This is natural, because the appeal of poetry—of *pure* poetry—is direct. We might even say, it is magical. It works on the senses through the immediate impact of visual and auditory images. The visual images are literally seen, if only by the inward eye ; the auditory images, embroidered in words, are literally heard, like notes of music. It is true that the words may at the same time convey a rational meaning, but this is not strictly necessary, and those critics who analyse one of the more musical of Shelley’s lyrics to prove that it is nonsensical are wide of the mark : meaning, in such a context, is largely irrelevant. Take, for example, these six fragmentary lines which describe the waning moon :

And like a dying lady, lean and pale,  
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,  
Out of her chamber, led by the insane  
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,  
The moon arose up in the murky East,  
A white and shapeless mass—

## A Coat of Many Colours

The image is vivid, but it is very nearly ludicrous ; and under no circumstances does the moon appear as “ a white and shapeless mass ”. But it does not matter : the words are magical, and once read, always remembered.

The imagination, in poetry, is an arbitrary and independent activity, capable of shocking us by its irrationality, its illogicality, and its coldness, or lack of what we call humanity. Nothing could be more typical of this quality in Shelley's verse than those *Lines* which were printed in Leigh Hunt's *Literary Pocket-Book* in 1823 :

### I

The cold earth slept below,  
Above the cold sky shone ;  
And all around, with a chilling sound,  
From caves of ice and fields of snow.  
The breath of night like death did flow  
Beneath the sinking moon.

### II

The wintry hedge was black,  
The green grass was not seen,  
The birds did rest on the bare thorn's breast,  
Whose roots, beside the pathway track,  
Had bound their folds o'er many a crack  
Which the frost had made between.

### III

Thine eyes glowed in the glare  
Of the moon's dying light ;  
As a fen-fire's beam on a sluggish stream  
Gleams dimly, so the moon shone there,  
And it yellowed the strings of thy raven hair,  
That shook in the wind of night.

### IV

The moon made thy lips pale, beloved—  
The wind made thy bosom chill—  
The night did shed on thy dear head  
Its frozen dew, and thou didst lie  
Where the bitter breath of the naked sky  
Might visit thee at will.

## Shelley

When it was first published, this poem was dated *November, 1815*, and modern editors suggest that this must be a mistake for *November, 1816*, since the verses "evidently", as they say, refer to the tragic suicide of Shelley's first wife, Harriet, which did not take place until the later date. That assumption shows the curious workings of the editorial mind, always anxious to find a material or circumstantial explanation for something which cannot be explained : the magic of poetry. If the poem has any reference to Harriet's death, I would rather assume that, like some other poems of Shelley's, it was prophetic in its vision—he more than once, for example, anticipated his own death by drowning. Such "prophetic vision" may in its turn submit to a reasoned psychological explanation, but that is not the point. In the moment of inspiration the poet is not reasoning, in any ordinary sense of the term : he is seeing and recording vivid imperative images. And in these *Lines* it is the accumulation of such images, of ice, of desolation, of darkness, of thorns and roots and raven hair, with the wind of night blowing over them, and the yellow light of the moon giving them an unearthly pallor, which impresses this picture of death so deeply on our minds. The mind of the poet in that moment of creation was not musing over a tragedy personal to himself, was not stirred by feelings of remorse or pity. It was recording as exactly and automatically as a machine—a miraculous machine, no doubt, but machine nevertheless, driven by a more-than-human, more-than-mortal, energy. But Shelley himself has described the process :

Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,  
But feeds on the æreal kisses  
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.  
He will watch from dawn to gloom  
The lake-reflected sun illumine  
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,



## A Coat of Many Colours

Nor heed, nor see, what things they be ;  
But from these, create he can  
Forms more real than living man,  
Nurslings of immortality.

We should read and re-read those well-known lines, and not let their meaning escape us through over-familiarity ; for they contain a very precise and adequate account of the nature of the poetic imagination.

Already we see, in this quotation, the close union of poetic imagination and exact reasoning. But this kind of reasoning, which is rather a record of psychological perception, is not quite what Mrs. Shelley referred to in her note on *The Revolt of the Islam*. She had in mind what she alternatively describes as " metaphysical discussions ", and says that the poet " deliberated at one time whether he should dedicate himself to poetry or metaphysics "—to metaphysics, that is to say, as a philosophical pursuit or profession. Actually, no such choice was possible. A man is born a metaphysician just as naturally as he is born a poet, and Shelley, like Dante before him, and like his contemporary Goethe, was naturally both poet and metaphysician. Unfortunately, that is a very rare combination, and there are relatively few people capable of appreciating both aspects of such metaphysical poets. I doubt if the philosophy of Dante, as distinct from his poetry, would have been so much appreciated but for the fact that he chose to be the exponent of the orthodox Christian philosophy of his time. Shelley's philosophy was defiantly heterodox, so in addition to the initial difficulty of being a philosophy of any kind, it has had to contend with the opposition and studied neglect of critics who, in so far as they were philosophical, were orthodox—of whom Matthew Arnold was the most typical as well as the most snobbish.

Shelley's metaphysical researches aimed at nothing less

## Shelley

than a rational explanation of the universe and of human existence. It is the very magnitude of his undertaking which has baffled his critics, for the philosophers have assumed that a poet could not be professional and the literary critics that his philosophy could not be profound. I am not aware of the existence of any serious attempt to come to terms with this philosophy before Carl Grabo began in recent years to publish his studies of Shelley's thought. I myself, who have never been inclined to depreciate the quality of Shelley's philosophy, had no conception of its range, depth and coherence until I had read this Chicago professor's patient exposition of the ideals underlying Shelley's poems.<sup>1</sup>

What I once attempted to do on a modest scale and by the psychological analysis of Shelley's personality, Professor Grabo has done by a complete and objective analysis of Shelley's works, and more particularly of these works in relation to the social, scientific and religious background of his age. Shelley's ideas have been traced to their source, related to each other and to their common background, and revealed as a coherent intellectual system. That his poetry must thereby gain immensely in significance should at once be obvious ; for the common complaint has been that Shelley lacked precisely such coherence.

Indeed to-day [to quote from the Preface to this book] more than a hundred years after his death, Shelley remains no more than the " beautiful and ineffectual angel " of Matthew Arnold's singularly unperceptive characterization. The limitations of Arnold's intelligence could scarcely better be intimated than by a phrase so inept.

Inept as Arnold was, the real villain of the piece is Mary Shelley, who, however difficult she may have found her

<sup>1</sup> Carl Grabo : *The Magic Plant : The Growth of Shelley's Thought*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1936).

## A Coat of Many Colours

husband in life, did nothing but sentimentalize him in death. It was she who, in the notes she affixed to the posthumous edition of his Poems, created the image of a whimsy Ariel which has ever since been so dear to superficial critics and romantic biographers. The decidedly scientific even if Platonic poet-philosopher whom Professor Grabo substitutes will not be such a popular figure, but he is demonstrably nearer the truth.

No one would claim that Shelley was to any great extent an original thinker. He had two masters, from whom he derived most of his ideas, and his originality, such as it is, consists in trying to reconcile their apparently contradictory systems. One of them, William Godwin, was a realist; the other, Plato, was a mystic. If we have only a superficial knowledge of Shelley's thought, we are tempted to assume that he began with a youthful admiration for the doctrines of Godwin and gradually abandoned them in favour of the mysticism of Plato. This simplification is based on the false assumption that realism and mysticism are inconsistent. It is one of Professor Grabo's finest achievements to expose this false assumption. "Only to simple souls", he writes, "are realism and mysticism mutually exclusive philosophies or attitudes of mind. Indeed, it may plausibly be argued that only as the mind perceives the boundaries of the visible and tangible world is the invisible world intelligible." In that sentence you have the key to Shelley's philosophy. From Godwin he derived a rational understanding of man and society; from Plato, an insight into the transcendental universe, the pattern underlying experience and determining thought.

H. N. Brailsford, who wrote a brilliant little book on *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* for the Home University Library, said that "to attempt to understand Shelley without the aid of Godwin is a task hardly more promising than it would be to read Milton without the Bible". Shelley's

## Shelley

bible was Godwin's *Political Justice*, first published in 1793, and a book which had an immense vogue in its day. Like Montesquieu *L'Esprit des Loix*, Rousseau's *Contrat Social*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Marx's *Capital* or Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, it is one of the classics of political theory. It has been unduly neglected for the past hundred years, because it is completely against the grain of those economic and political developments which are associated with the Industrial Revolution. In that sense it stands at the opposite pole to Marx's masterpiece. The doctrine it preaches has been called "philosophical" anarchism, but it is difficult to know why anarchism, as distinct from monarchism, conservatism, collectivism or any other political theory, should be labelled "philosophical"—presumably because it is held to be impracticable. But certainly neither Godwin nor Shelley regarded their political theory as merely theoretical; on the contrary, they put it forward as the most rational and common-sense view of men and society. Since it has not yet been proved that the collectivism to which the Western world has now apparently committed itself is necessarily an ideal solution of the social problem, it is too early to conclude that Godwin and Shelley were absolutely wrong.

Godwin's political theories are not read to-day, and his books are unprocurable; but fortunately the substance of them is to be found in Shelley's *Queen Mab*, which Brailsford described as "nothing but Godwin in verse, with prose notes which quote or summarize him". These notes, incidentally, give a good indication of the extent of Shelley's scientific interests at this time, interests astronomical, geological, physical and mythological, as well as historical and philosophical. He was then eighteen. But Godwin was not a passing enthusiasm for the youthful Shelley: his greatest poems, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*, are permeated with the same ideas. That last great fragment,

## A Coat of Many Colours

*The Triumph of Life*, though so Platonic in its imagery and meaning, is still faithful to the ideals of his first master.

Shelley's Hellenism is another subject too big to trace even in outline here. He was, I believe, both in spirit and knowledge, a profounder Hellenist than any other English poet, profounder even than Goethe, and only rivalled by his great contemporary, the German poet Hölderlin. He made a translation of one of Plato's works, the *Symposium* or *Banquet*, and in a Preface to that translation paid a tribute to his master.

Plato [he wrote] exhibits the rare union of close and subtle logic with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendour and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions, which hurry the persuasions onward, as in a breathless career. His language is that of an immortal spirit, rather than a man. . . . His views into the nature of mind and existence are often obscure, only because they are profound; and though his theories respecting the government of the world, and the elementary laws of moral action, are not always correct, yet there is scarcely any of his treatises which do not, however stained by puerile sophisms, contain the most remarkable intuitions into all that can be the subject of the human mind.

Those words which Shelley used of Plato, we in our turn might apply to Shelley. In his longer poems and in his brief and fragmentary prose writings, Shelley gave expression to what we sometimes call a synthetic philosophy, meaning by that a fusion, in the unity of his personality or vision of the world, of such apparently disparate elements as Platonism, anarchism and contemporary science. It is a very subtle and profound philosophy, which has often been condemned by people who have not taken the trouble to understand it, and who in some cases have not had the mental power.

In our own scientific pride we sometimes forget that

## Shelley

Newton and Davy preceded Darwin and Einstein, and that the natural philosophers of Shelley's time had a theory of the material universe no less consistent and no more final than ours. The same conflict between matter and spirit, determinism and free will, existed then as now, and then as now the supreme effort of philosophy was to establish a monistic theory of the universe "in which matter and being—all the phenomenal world—are conceived as but manifestations of thought".

The scientific speculations of Shelley's time were not less materialistic than those of to-day ; on the whole they were more naïvely mechanistic than at any time since then. But Shelley was not long in perceiving the inadequacy of a purely rationalistic interpretation of the universe, and the synthesis to which he was logically driven has perhaps a good deal in common with Bergsonism. Whatever we may call it, the synthesis of understanding and intuition, of perception and representation, of reality and dream, remains the central problem of all speculations—of all dialectics. Both Christianity and Marxism are equally synthetic resolutions of this same problem. Professor Grabo calls Shelley "the greatest of Protestants among modern poets and thinkers", so probably, to a world which has not yet dared to conceive Marxism as a reintegration of Christianity, Shelley is to be classed as a prophet rather than a disciple.

We speak of these philosophies—Platonism, Christianity, Marxism—in abstract intellectual terms, but all alike are firmly based on human experience, and are profoundly ethical in their practical teaching. Shelley, too, was moved primarily by his acute sense of the else unfelt oppressions of this earth, by the desire to alleviate the sufferings of mankind. Carl Grabo would not have us ignore this zealous aspect of the poet. "I feel for the recognition of Shelley's philosophic greatness the passionate

## A Coat of Many Colours

concern which he felt for the recognition of ideas needful to the regeneration of the world ; and the same impatience with a world blind to him as to them." There is no promise that such impatience will be assuaged in our time ; but Shelley's intellectual reputation is redeemed, and by that act the world itself is a step nearer redemption.

His philosophy would have received its supreme expression in *The Triumph of Life*, a noble Dantesque fragment, written like Dante's own great poem, in *terza rima*, and designed to tell, like the *Divine Comedy* but with a difference,

. . . the wondrous story

How all things are transfigured except love.

But though *The Triumph of Life* promised to be a maturer poem than *Prometheus Unbound*, it is in this great epic that the best of Shelley's thought receives sublime poetic expression. There are passages in it of somewhat pedestrian blank verse, and at times the rhetoric strikes the sophisticated modern ear much too forcibly, but it is an immense imaginative conception, carried out with the confidence of a supreme poetic technician, and conveying a complete and coherent vision of human destiny.

### 26. *Problems of Primitive Art*

THE French have a phrase, "l'art rupestre" (Latin *rupes*, a rock), which very conveniently covers all those types of art which are engraved or drawn on rocks or in caves by primitive races of men. We tend to distinguish between "cave drawings", by which we mean the art of prehistoric men of the Stone Age, and "rock paintings", by which we mean the more recent art of the bushmen of Africa and Australia ; but these types of art show not only a close æsthetic similarity, but even historical continuity,

## Problems of Primitive Art

so a generic term is desirable. Until one is invented, we must make use of the rather ambiguous word "primitive". Such art, however, is only primitive in the historical sense ; from an æsthetic point of view it often far surpasses the art of later and more civilized communities.

The general features of the prehistoric art of the Stone Age become more familiar every day. The caves, particularly those in the Dordogne district in France, are visited by thousands of tourists every year. They are lit up by electricity, and provided with guichets, entrance fees and guides like any other historical monument. There are now some sixty of these sites in France and Spain, most of them discovered in the last forty years. It is still possible that more sites may be discovered in Europe, but interest has now shifted to Africa, where, particularly in the Sahara region, important discoveries are being made. Details of what are said to be very remarkable rock paintings at Tibesti on the eastern side of the desert are not yet available ; but Count F. de Chasseloup Laubat has published a very interesting account of his discoveries in the Hoggar district to the north-west of the desert.<sup>1</sup> The engravings and drawings vary considerably in composition and style, from a large isolated engraving of a lion, quite schematic and symbolic in style, to very lively and naturalistic representations of hunting scenes.

The newly discovered engravings and drawings are similar to the palæolithic art of the French and Spanish caves. Before drawing any conclusions from this similarity, we must freely admit that the human mind at any given stage of development is likely to express itself in a similar way given similar conditions of environment. But there are certain characteristics in the Hoggar art which have led Count de Chasseloup Laubat to form a wider hypothesis. He suggests that we may be concerned with an art which

<sup>1</sup> *Art Rupestre au Hoggar*. Paris (Librairie Plon), 1938.



## A Coat of Many Colours

was brought into Northern Africa by palæolithic man as he retreated from the glacial climate of Europe, and that when the Hoggar civilization was dispersed by the increasing aridity of the Sahara, one branch of it moved eastward and influenced the pre-dynastic art of Egypt. This hypothesis involves dating the earliest of the Hoggar paintings and engravings to the remote period of the Stone Age, and the arguments are fairly convincing. In the first place, some of the subjects are so naturalistic and display such an accurate observation of the subject that they are not likely to be memorized impressions of distant scenes ; that is to say, they depicted the life surrounding these hills, and therefore revert to a period when the Sahara was inhabited by elephants, ostriches and herds of cattle, and had a climate and vegetation to support such animals. As we find giraffes among the animals represented, the author argues that the vegetation must have been of a considerable luxuriance and height. Climatic conditions of such a nature have not existed in the Sahara within historic times. Secondly, the engravings, which were executed by means of a flint tool, imply a race able to make and manipulate such tools. Finally, though the expedition had neither the time nor the equipment to make scientific diggings, a stone implement of the neolithic period was actually found on the site.

Whatever their age, it is certain that the oldest of these African rock paintings are continuous with the much more recent and even contemporary art of the bushmen. If in the other direction they can be linked up with the art of the Stone Age, then the significance of the paintings for the bushman of to-day may throw some light on the mystery of the earliest artistic activities of mankind. For the prehistoric cave drawings still divide scientific opinion into two schools, one affirming that the drawings were inspired by and ministered to a magical cult, the other seeing in

## Problems of Primitive Art

them nothing but the free expression of an artistic impulse. Of late years the magical school has been winning. It is difficult on any other hypothesis to explain why the drawings and engravings should so often be hidden in the depths of long subterranean caverns ; and the association of arrows and masked dancers with the animals also seems to point to magical practices. On the other side it is argued that the Stone Age drawings are not always in caves ; they occur on open rock surfaces often only a few miles away from the caverns. Arrows would naturally be associated with hunting scenes of no magical significance ; and as for the so-called masked dancers, these may be merely hunters. I have always felt that the famous "Sorcerer" in the cave of Trois Frères in the Pyrenees district, which depicts a human being wearing a stag's pelt, might just as readily be interpreted as a camouflaged stalker as a dancing medicine-man. And this particular drawing is the strongest piece of evidence brought forward by the magical school. .

What is certain is that among the bushmen and among the more settled natives of the African continent, there are drawings which have a magical significance and others which are free expressions of the artistic impulse. But magical, which is apt to convey all kinds of ritualistic and supernatural complications, is perhaps not the right word to use in this connection. Animistic would be better. The native's world is dualistic. He believes that not only every human being has a soul, but also every animal ; and he is very worried, to say the least of it, if a disembodied soul is left at loose. The cult of the mask, an object which accounts for such a large proportion of native African art, is due to this belief. The mask is a depository for some wandering soul—for some soul not properly disposed of by the obsequies which attend a normal death. Such masks are generally kept in a secret and obscure place.

## A Coat of Many Colours

The analogy is obvious. The caves of the Stone Age were the secret places where the hunters of the period disposed of the souls of the animals they had slain. So much we admit. But it is too much to claim that the artists who engraved or painted such animals in the depths of a cave did not use their talents in other places and for other purposes—or for no purpose at all. The artistic quality of the drawings implies a human being of considerable sensibility—above all, a human being. It is only human that the artist of the Stone Age, like the bushman artist of a later age, should exercise his talent whenever he found himself with nothing much to do and a tempting rock surface at hand. For though primitive man believed that every soul must be provided with a permanent resting-place, and that an image would serve the purpose, I know of no evidence which suggests that he had to provide a soul for every image he made. We may be quite sure that the soul was not lodged in the image without due ceremony; an image, therefore, which had not been subjected to such a ceremony would possess no particular significance. It would be simply a work of art.

### 27. *Milton*

MILTON's rank as a poet was never secure; Addison said that "our language sunk under him", and Johnson's famous "Life" of the poet is full of censure. His dismissal of *Lycidas* as "easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting", its diction "harsh", its rhymes "uncertain" and its numbers "unpleasing", is one of the curiosities of literary criticism. But to-day there are many of us who hold that his praise of *Paradise Lost* is no less extravagant—"a poem which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second,

## Milton

among the productions of the human mind ". There are no statistics available and literary merit is not determined by suffrage ; but the number of people who now read the whole of this epic from free choice rather than academic duty must be exceedingly small. This may be partly explained by the general neglect of poetry, but no unprejudiced critic can defend the vast tracts of dull and involved rhetoric which give the poem its epic bulk. In detail, too, the poetic style or diction, with its inversions, latinities, and obscure allusions, cannot but be regarded as a sluggish backwater in the swift and clear stream of English poetry. But the poem has many virtues to outbalance these defects—dramatic coherence, moral fervour, and a resounding music which stays in the mind long after prettier tinklings have faded out.

The main hindrance to the general appreciation of Milton's poetry is a certain artificiality, which is, however, quite distinct from the artificiality of Dryden or Pope. Milton, to whom we owe the very phrase " unpremeditated verse ", is known to have composed in gusts of inspiration. It follows that this quality of artificiality, which is present in *Lycidas* no less than in *Samson Agonistes*, is rather a reflection of his mind and constitution than a slow and deliberate construction of his intellect. If it were not present in his early poems, it might have been ascribed to his blindness ; as it is, we must suppose that it is due to abstract or metaphysical habits of thought, and as such it reappears in the similar case of Shelley. The advantage in this kind of poet is that he will have a more considerable influence on the minds of his fellow men ; for in civilized communities the mind is apt to be more accessible than the senses.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 28. *Sickert*

OUR reactions to a work of art are not necessarily æsthetic ; however much the purists may resent it, people are accustomed to demand from pictures, and artists generally supply, information of various kinds, anecdotes, illustrations to their vague thoughts. This is sometimes called the intellectual element in art, but I feel that " intellectual " is at once too fine and too forbidding a word to use in this connection. What we are expecting from the work of art is an illustration ; just as we frankly expect a book illustrator (usually regarded as an inferior type of artist) to make a graphic representation of characters or scenes in a book, so we expect the painter and the sculptor (usually regarded as superior types of artist) to make a graphic representation of general ideas, historical events, topographical views, or living people. For many people—I suspect for most people—that is the only demand made on the artist, the only function assigned to him. Perhaps unconsciously they respond to the formal arrangement of the picture, but that this formal response is very weak can be demonstrated by psychological experiments which prove that only in exceptional cases is there any constant sense of form. That sense, like any other latent sense, can be educated and trained ; but such possibilities apart, art is for the few, illustration for the many.

Sickert had a somewhat cynical realization of this truth. He once confessed in a letter, Mrs. Woolf tells us,<sup>1</sup> " I have always been a literary painter, thank goodness, like all the decent painters ". But there are more ways than one of being literary, and I am not convinced, to come at once to the point of these remarks, that Sickert's literariness

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf: *Walter Sickert: a Conversation.* London (Hogarth Press), 1934.

## Sickert

has much in common with the literariness of the decent painters. Sickert was so determined to be literary that he ended by being literal ; he resorted to books and to book illustrations, and gave us on canvas an enlarged version of what he found there. He no longer invented a theme ; he did not even trouble to invent the illustration of a theme. He gave us, in delightful colour but in a technique of scamped brushstrokes on coarse canvas which will surely wear badly with the years, what is no more than a pastiche. I don't suppose that Sickert intended it to be more, and as such it is charming enough. But we should not confuse such pleasant fancies with the serious business of art—which has something in common, surely, with the serious business of life.

For Sickert, the whole of the post-impressionist movement has been “spoof”, “the biggest racket of the century”, imposed on the ever-gullible public by clever dealers. As for Cézanne, history must needs describe him as “*un grand raté*, an incomplete giant”. Sickert grants him a tiny percentage of successes, but the technical methods he used were just those which seemed to Sickert least likely to produce fine painting. “Cézanne less than anyone achieved significant form. What is the first gift needed to achieve significant form? A sense of *aplomb*. Cézanne was utterly incapable of getting two eyes to tally, or a figure to sit or stand without lurching. . . . Cézanne will only be remembered as a curious and pathetic by-product of the Impressionist group.” And much else to the same effect. As for the Post-impressionists who followed Cézanne—again, it is all “spoof”. “Picassos and Matisses could be painted by all the coachmen that the rise of the motor traffic has thrown out of employment.” Progress, Sickert emphasizes in a string of capitals, is the slow unfolding of a profound and comprehended conservatism. And again :

## A Coat of Many Colours .

There is no new art. There are no new methods. There is no new theory. The old one is great. It prevails, it has prevailed and it will prevail. There can no more be a new art, a new painting, a new drawing, than there can be new arithmetic, new dynamics, or a new morality. . . . The error of the critical quidnunc is to suppose that the older things are SUPERSEDED. They are NOT superseded. They have been ADDED TO. That is all.

But that is more or less what Cézanne said, and neither Matisse nor Picasso, nor any of the critics who support them, is likely to deny this truth. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* is true of all the transformations of art. The test of a free sensibility is that it can always perceive the eternal through its temporal dress. Sickert, like so many painters who turn critic, failed in this respect. Such people are so conditioned by their own technical habits that they cannot conceive that the truth can be expressed in any other way. More than that, they cannot see the truth for the technique. Sickert is always admirable as an exponent of the technique of painting, whether it is his own or that of an old master. Take the following passage, for example, from an essay he wrote in *Art and Letters* (1918) :

The instrument of oil-paint contains two distinct resources, the combination of which alone can display to the full the abundance of its wealth and the extent of a region in which no other medium can touch it. . . . The two resources are : firstly, the tones selected and compared as opaque ; and secondly, their effect as spread thinly, and playing thus a semi-transparent rôle, on the colour of a given preparation. . . . It is on the interaction of such grounds with the painting proper that the complete master of the medium relies. To use the housepainter's expression, the ground "grins through".

This observation, so illuminating as the explanation of the technique of Frans Hals, David, Constable, Renoir or Whistler, and of Sickert himself, does not, of course, neces-

## Sickert

sarily explain the technique of all painters—of all the painters who painted before the invention of oil painting and of all who find that the juxtaposition of pure colours is also a medium of expression which has its own justification. There may be no new art and no new methods, but Sickert's mistake is to assume that there is only one type of art, only one method of painting. Within his conventions, he is a perfect painter and a just critic ; but it is almost incredible that intelligence should be at once so acute and so narrow. It is all the more strange when one considers the breadth of Sickert's human sympathies. "Taste", he wrote in one of his memorable *New Age* articles, "is the death of a painter. He has all his work cut out for him, observing and recording. His poetry is in the interpretation of ready-made life." There is something very profound in the wholeness of Sickert's conception of art—not the human figure isolated, not the landscape isolated, not the still-life isolated, but the whole of creation in its organic unity. If the painter can place himself within this existential flow, and make his art part of its living continuity, then his art has a social relevance far greater than any pattern "abstracted" from that reality.

The real subject of a picture or a drawing is the plastic facts it succeeds in expressing ; and all the world of pathos, of poetry, of sentiment that it succeeds in conveying, is conveyed by means of the plastic facts expressed, by the suggestions of the three dimensions of space, the suggestion of weight, the prelude or refrain of movement, the promise of movement to come, or the echo of movement past.

It is in such words as these that Sickert reveals his profound understanding of art, and we must conclude that he was prevented from acknowledging the immense contribution which Cézanne made to the expression of precisely such plastic facts by some personal prejudice. Sickert's



## A Coat of Many Colours

bitter contempt for certain aspects of modern art was no doubt due to the feeling that he personally, and all he stood for, had been unduly neglected by contemporary critics. I think we must admit that the personal element in this resentment was justified. Sickert always seemed to be forgotten in the excitement of making and unmaking reputations ; or, if not forgotten, he was not taken seriously. It was felt—Roger Fry once said as much—that Sickert was too fond of pretending that this business of art is all a joke. There is, of course, some justification in the charge—Sickert was not only a considerable wit, in speech as well as in paint, but he was in revolt against that tradition of high seriousness into which, in the year 1860, he had been born. We must also remember that he could hardly be described as a full-blooded Englishman. His father was Danish and he himself was born in Munich and lived there for the first nine years of his life. And what is more to the point, he was a pupil of that very un-English painter, James McNeill Whistler. From Whistler he inherited an attitude, but not a style, and in his restless unsettled life it was the attitude, the pose and affectation of the man himself that attracted most attention. For on the whole it was the most original thing about him. His style or technique he took from Degas, and it was his misfortune to rest under that mighty shadow all his days.

But under the shadow of Degas there is room for a considerable artist, and if Sickert's lack of originality deprived him of contemporary interest, in the long run the qualities he shared with Degas will tell. He had not the scale and scope of the great French impressionist, but he had the same passionate devotion to painterly virtues and the same zest for humanity. By painterly virtues I mean the expressive qualities of his medium—oil paint. Sickert believed, and we can hardly deny the logic of his belief, that the art of painting is based on the accumulated wisdom

## Sickert

of generations of practitioners ; he was, that is to say, first and foremost a craftsman, and that is why he despised more recent schools of painting which have been content to sacrifice craftsmanship for other virtues—immediacy of inspiration or speed of production. As for his humanity, this was simply a belief that every picture should tell a story. This quality should have made him a popular painter, the ideal of those political theorists who assume that art has only to be realistic to be acceptable to the masses. But Sickert disproved the theory, for what the masses want is not realism but sentimentalism. And Sickert was not sentimental : his colour is pitched too low for popular taste and his stories are too mordant. His life is one more chapter in the sad history of art in England. When that history takes a happier turn, Sickert, we may be sure, will be more honoured than he ever was in his own lifetime.

### 29. *Film Æsthetic*

THE æsthetic of an art is always resented by the practitioner, and perhaps there is a particular reason why theory should not obtrude itself on the art of the film. That art is not yet formed, and to theorize about something which is not yet fully in being may seem the height of pedantic indiscretion. But one kind of æsthetics is essentially *a priori* : it is the discovery of universal laws of art, and if the film is to be an art, then these theoretical considerations are as relevant to it as to any other art, and can guide its line of development.

*If the film is an art*—but what else can it be ? A technical process ? But so is etching, for example ; so is every art which uses a tool. To determine whether a given process is an art or not, we need only ask one question—does it

## A Coat of Many Colours

involve *selection* ? For selection implies (a) a standard for which selection is made ; (b) sensibility to distinguish according to this standard. The exercise of sensibility in the interests of a standard is an elementary definition of art. Selection, I think it can be shown, is the very first principle of the film ; the film is therefore essentially an art.

The film is visual. That fact immediately links it—from the point of view of *æsthetics*—with the visual or, as they are more commonly but less accurately called, the plastic arts. “ Moving pictures ”—the Movies—that is the most descriptive title which has ever been given to the Film. Picture plus Movement : that is the definition of a film, and if we can introduce into the *æsthetics* of pictorial art the modifications required by this new factor, then we shall have an *æsthetic* of the Film.

But it is not so simple as it sounds. To introduce this new factor into the picture involves conditions which almost entirely separate pictorial art (let us say painting) from the film. This is the essential distinction—even opposition—between the painting and the film : the painting is composed subjectively, the film objectively. However highly we rate the function of the scenario writer—in actual practice it is rated very low—we must recognize that the film is not transposed directly and freely from the mind by means of a docile medium like paint, but must be cut piece-meal out of the lumbering material of the actual visible world.

Painting is a synthesis (I ignore the crude notion that it is imitation) ; the film is essentially analysis. The painter composes within his mind (that is to say, makes a synthesis of) selected elements of his visual experience. (In the actual process of composition he goes beyond his experience, guided by imagination and sensibility.) The director of a film begins with the same visual experience, but he is anchored to his material. To make his material significant

## Film Æsthetic

—significant of more than its actuality, its news value—he must break the continuity of his vision—jump from one stepping-stone of significance to another. He must analyse the scene for its significant aspects. (For example, in films like *Rain* or *Pierement* the camera's motto is "Say when". The producer goes about like a ferret for significance, crying "Now !")

The film purists insist on the mechanical nature of the process (as though a paint-brush, an engraving-tool, a piano, were not also pieces of mechanism). The true inspiration for the film, they say, is to be found in its technical possibilities. "Der Apparat ist die Muse" (Béla Balázs). But it is necessary to distinguish between the tool and the material (the medium), between the "Apparat" and that which is operated upon. The sculptor's muse is not his chisel, but the marble ; perhaps more accurately it is the impact of these two factors, creative inspiration depending on a sensuous reaction to the feel of the chisel against the marble. There is the same sensuous factor in the application of a charged brush to canvas ; and the same factor is obvious in music. The camera is the film-director's tool, his medium is light, or rather the impact of light on solid objects. It might be better still to regard the camera as a chisel of light, cutting into the reality of objects. In any case, light is the muse.

We might abandon the word selection, because it is too static in its implications. We need to emphasize the mobility, the plasticity of the film. For this is the quality by virtue of which the film becomes an art. I have used these two words, mobility and plasticity, as interchangeable. But note that in sculpture, for example, an object is moulded, made plastic, to arrive at an immobile, absolute, eternal status ; in the film the immobility (even when moving !) of objects is, as it were, unmoulded, made plastic, to arrive at a mobile, relative, and transitory object. Sculpture is

## A Coat of Many Colours

the art of space, as music is of time. The film is the art of space-time : it is a space-time continuum.

There are at least three directions (or dimensions) in which movement may take place : (1) movement of the camera, (2) movement of light, (3) movement of the object photographed. Combinations of such movements produce almost endless possibilities of plastic form.

The true plasticity of the film, the plasticity which gives the film its uniqueness, is a plasticity of light. An essential film would be an abstract film, a "pure" creation of light and darkness, just as an essential painting is an abstract painting. But such films are only for the purists.

The question of form is difficult. Even in painting we must distinguish between closed form (form determined by the frame and plane of the painted surface) and open form (form which ignores these limits and prolongs itself into the space about the painting, typified in Baroque art). We may select "stills" for their closed form—for their pictorial composition—but the film itself is essentially open form. It continually implies the space around the objects represented and beyond the limits of the screen ; it endeavours to make the part represent the whole. It is an art of "cuts"—economy cuts.

Its freedom threatens the film ; it is a runaway. The problem of the film as an art-form may be reduced to the invention of proper conventions. It must reject the unities proper to the drama (nothing is so feeble as the filmed play) but it must discover the unities proper to a space-time "continuum". Perhaps its only possible unity is the absence of any unity ; the film is essentially alogical. In the film events can occur simultaneously ; they can be represented in more than one unit of dimension ; time itself can be controlled. Its only unity is continuity.

\* How easily this continuity may be destroyed is seen in the average talkie. The talk interrupts the continuity of

## Film Æsthetic

the movement, or at least delays it. We begin to listen, instead of looking. But once we consciously listen in the cinema, we might as well be in the theatre.

It is difficult to see any distinct art-form evolving out of the talkie. But we must distinguish between the talkie pure and simple, and the film with "effects". Even speech may be an effect, as we see most clearly in René Clair's films, where speech is used sparingly, and never interrupts the continuity of the film. Speech must keep time with the film, but the normal film annihilates time. Therefore it must annihilate speech.

The same observations may be made of musical accompaniment. It must keep time with the film. Therefore the film must either be a direct transcript of the music (as a film of a dancer dancing to music might be), or the music must be composed for the film (as Edmund Meisel's music for *Potemkin*).

This does not imply that the talkie has no future. But its laws will not be the laws of the pure film, and the sooner it works out its own salvation the better. Rudolf Arnheim<sup>1</sup> uses the following analogy. A piece of music may be composed as a solo for the piano. It may afterwards be transposed as a duet for piano and violin. It will remain essentially the same piece of music, but both the piano part and the violin part taken separately will not represent the original music; each has been modified to make a unity when played together. So both speech and film must be modified to make a perfect talkie.

Ignoring the plasticity of the filming process itself, we may still find a justification for the film as an art-form in the process of montage. Montage is mechanized imagination. The producer deliberately interferes with the anonymity, the impersonality of the camera. He takes its mechanical products (how little mechanical they need be

<sup>1</sup> *Film*. London (Faber & Faber), 1933.

## A Coat of Many Colours

we have already seen) and arranges them as freely as the painter arranges his forms and colours. It is the most important stage in the whole process of film-production, æsthetically considered. This has been realised by film theoreticians like Pudowkin and Timoschenko. Arnheim, in the book already cited, examines their principles and reduces them (or rather extends them—they occupy four pages!) into a logical order. There are four main principles: (1) the principle of cutting itself, (2) time conditions, (3) space conditions, and (4) relations of content. The first principle is concerned with questions of rhythm (a series of relatively long and equal scenes securing a peaceful rhythm, a series or alternate long and short scenes securing a quicker rhythm, and so on), with questions of scenes within scenes, scenes running concurrently, and with all ways of combining the part and the whole, close-ups and concentration, etc. The second principle is concerned with securing effects of contemporaneity, effects of memory and foresight, causal effects, annihilation of time effects, etc. The third principle secures the same kind of effects by showing different events in the same setting, or by jumping from one space conception of a scene to another space conception of the same scene. The fourth principle secures parallelism or contrast of effects, or both together (e.g. Timoschenko: the shackled feet of a prisoner in his cell, followed by the legs of a ballet dancer at the theatre).

The more we insist on the plasticity of the film (that is to say, on its artistic possibilities) the more we require the imaginative artist in the process of production. This is quite against the present trend, which is to reduce the rôle of the scenario-writer to insignificance. But when the film has exhausted its technical *élan*, then it must inevitably return to the poets. For the quality of an art always depends finally on the quality of the mind directing it or

## James Joyce

producing it, and no art can survive on a purely mechanical inspiration. There will always be a place for the recording film, for the scientific film, the news film ; but finally the public will demand the film of imagination, of vision. And then will come the day of the poet, the scenario-writer, or whatever we are to call him. For actually this artist will be a new type of artist—an artist with the visual sensibility of the painter, the vision of the poet, and the time-sense of the musician. Instead of doubting the artistic possibilities of the film as a medium, we should rather doubt the artistic capability of man to rise to the high opportunities of this new medium. It is a new Pandora's box that the movie-man carries about, from which he has already released all kinds of evils, but at the bottom of which hope still remains.

### 30. *James Joyce*

To explain the significance of James Joyce it is necessary in the first place to make a distinction between two literary publics. This is difficult, because any such division seems to imply some kind of snobism: the kind of snobism ridiculed as "high-brow", for example. But the distinction between high-brow and low-brow really begs the question ; from the point of view of the music-hall comedian and his friend, the man-in-the-street, all serious writing is high-brow. For the purpose of this enquiry I would like to assume that we are all high-brows. Then we still need a distinction between what we may call a craft-conscious public, and a public merely out for instinctive enjoyment. The latter forms the majority, and to it most works of art are addressed. But there exists this other public, perhaps only numbering a few hundreds in any country, for whom literature is not a question of the direct absorption of a



## A Coat of Many Colours

synthetic product, the work of art, but rather the analysis of it. Some people like a machine because it runs smoothly, and ask no more ; others will be seeing how it works. It is to this latter type that the art of James Joyce appeals.

The two kinds of enjoyment are essentially different, but I do not think that there is any aura of intellectual superiority attached to either. The explanation is probably psychological ; to one type the work of art appeals as a unity : they like to see the world of appearances reduced to a static definiteness ; their enjoyment is contemplative. To the other type, for whom stability and order are perhaps matters of course, the work of art appears as a harmony of distinct parts, and the harmony cannot be appreciated until the parts are seen in disjunction ; enjoyment is dynamic.

So far so good ; but in making this distinction we assume the identical nature of all works of art. The author of a novel does not stop to consider whether he should write for this kind of public or for that ; his business, if he is a serious artist, is to create a work of art. That is to say, his object is always synthetic, and he does not care what kind of æsthetic enjoyment his work induces. But this is where the peculiarity of Joyce's method becomes evident. He is writing deliberately for the analysing public, and in his later work at any rate we may fairly say that the enjoyment is proportionate to the analytical power which his readers can contribute. In almost any single paragraph they will, if they persist, find a hundred shifting lights. There is an underlying warp which is the idle chatter of two washer-women washing linen in the River Liffey. Into this warp is woven a weft which is every kind of association aroused by the running river in the very well-stored brain of the author. These associations may be conscious and are often erudite—references to Greek myths, to the Vedic religion, to obscure languages, to local legend or historical

## James Joyce

events ; or they may be associations springing from the subconscious mind—puns, verbal distortions, thinly disguised obscenities, or merely euphonic or euphuistic word-play.

To the first kind of reader I described, it will all look and sound like so much gibberish. But those who are analytically minded will get a good deal of enjoyment from the mental effort of keeping up with the agile acrobatics of the author. It is a legitimate form of enjoyment, but how, it will be asked, does it differ from the enjoyment of a really difficult and erudite crossword puzzle? Here I must confess that I am not sufficiently a partisan of Joyce's methods to answer with my confidence. I only know that if this gibberish is read aloud it does acquire an odd sort of impressiveness, akin to the impressiveness of poetry read in a foreign language we do not understand. Beyond this there may be some kind of formal structure analogous to the structure of a fugue in music, but it is not in any way obvious.

A comprehensive explanation of Joyce's art would have to follow his development as a writer. I think I have read everything that he published, and to me the extravagances of his later works did not come as a surprise. I see them as a gradual development from his earliest work. I see them also as an outcome of his innate romanticism. I know that Joyce has been hailed as a classical writer, particularly by his commentator, Stuart Gilbert,<sup>1</sup> but that is a classification which I cannot accept. It rests on the fact that *Ulysses*, Joyce's masterpiece, is based throughout on a close structural parallelism with Homer's *Odyssey*. The notion rests on a fallacy which identifies form and content ; just as though we were to say that water poured into a vase takes on the form and properties of that vase. All the

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Gilbert : *James Joyce's Ulysses*. London (Faber & Faber), 1930.

## A Coat of Many Colours

evidence, it seems to me, goes to show that Joyce is really a romantic. His first stories, *Dubliners*, revealed that romantic interest in realism which comes from Norway rather than Greece ; and his only play, *Exiles*, is a psychological drama far removed from the canons of classical drama. *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1916, is a work of great lyrical beauty, but it also belongs to that introspective mode of self-projection which is the very type of romantic literature. Even if we read into it a certain ironic detachment, we must still remember that irony is only perverted sentiment, and the recourse of disillusioned romantics. But the most complete evidence of Joyce's romanticism is to be found in his verse—*Chamber Music* and *Pomes Penyeach*. For example :

The moon's grey-golden meshes make  
All night a veil,  
The shorelamps in the sleeping lake  
Laburnum tendrils trail.

The sly reeds whisper to the night  
A name—her name—  
And all my soul is a delight,  
A swoon of shame.

Mr. Gilbert quotes this poem as evidence of Joyce's classical spirit, presumably because it is written in regular iambs ! It is the same assumption as that which led him to claim *Ulysses* as a classical work. The truth is, that what matters in the distinction between romantic and classic is not the form, but the informing spirit. The only tolerable distinction between romanticism and classicism is that which relates itself to the distinction drawn by psychologists between introspective and objective types of personality. Romanticism is the expression of personal values, classicism the expression of universal values. It may be true that all classicists are, or have been, in some degree romantic (they would not be human otherwise), and

## James Joyce

it is therefore possible to admit the early romanticism of Joyce, and still claim a classical spirit for *Ulysses*. But I do not think this claim can be allowed, because the necessities of objectivity imply an ever-increasing tendency towards clarity, simplicity, and universality. There is profundity in classical art, but no obscurity. That, if anything, is its main disadvantage, for the mind is so constituted that it likes to encounter a certain measure of resistance in its perceptions. Therein lies one of the justifications of romanticism.

By accusing Joyce of romanticism, I am not condemning him. It is not the business of the critic to take sides in this everlasting opposition of romantic and classic. His business is merely to identify and classify. With no other than a scientific intention, I find Joyce to be a romantic poet of the most extreme kind; he is so romantic that he has reduced his egocentricity to its last refinement, and evolved an art of which only he himself can be the full participant. But in the process he has so revitalised the current use of language, that no one interested in the art of writing from a craft-conscious point of view can afford to neglect his example and achievement.

### 31. *The Language of the Eye*

It is sometimes assumed that wars interrupt the course of art, and that after a crisis such as Europe is now undergoing, some startling new development may be expected. But in modern history there is no evidence for such a belief. The war of 1870 made singularly little difference to the development of Impressionism in France. Cézanne went on painting, indifferent to the turmoil around him, anxious only to escape his call-up. Pissarro fled to England and continued to paint his exquisite pictures. Monet went

## A Coat of Many Colours

to Holland where he painted windmills and canals. Bazille was killed—a serious loss but not one which, so far as we can tell, made any difference to the evolution of modern painting. It was the same during the war of 1914-18. People prophesied that it would kill Cubism and Futurism. It only served to consolidate those movements, and the decade which followed the war brought to full maturity the art of Matisse, Picasso, Maillol and Klee.

Our modern wars have been a more serious interruption to the work of painters in belligerent countries, but a few have carried on their serene art uninfluenced by the insane strife around them; and many more only await the day of peace to take up their brushes or chisels and continue where, a few years ago, they left off. Modern art is a challenge: a challenge to lazy habits of thought, to tired senses and uneasy minds, above all a challenge to what might be called complacency of vision. There is a conventional way of seeing, just as there is a conventional way of eating or talking. There is a conventional way of looking at nature. An artist is a man who looks at nature with unclouded vision. He is continually gathering material from his experience of things seen. In this material he finds forms and qualities which start him off, excite his ideas and stimulate his emotions, and cause him to play with these forms and qualities, reconstruct them and recreate them until they become images which express the reality of his visual experiences. But this process which goes on in his mind is a severe test of his sincerity. He may be satisfied with a transcript of the appearance of the things he sees, and so may his public. But every honest artist knows that appearances do not necessarily correspond to the reality. Most likely it may only be possible to represent the reality by some kind of symbol. As a modern painter has expressed it: "I found that I could express what I felt only by paraphrasing what I saw" (Graham

## The Language of the Eye

Sutherland). Wordsworth, in one of his most memorable passages, speaks of "a dim and undetermined sense Of unknown modes of being". That is the artist's feeling in the presence of nature, and his art is an attempt to render that sense in clear and definite images.

It is an activity which requires the willing collaboration of the spectator. I do not mean that the appreciation of art involves intellectual effort. It is not a question of thought or even of understanding. That kind of effort in front of a work of art only produces an inhibition in the spectator, like the common experience of being unable to remember something the harder we try. The true approach is open-minded. If we meet a stranger, we do not know what his voice will sound like, nor even if he will speak our language. We wait expectantly. In much the same way we should wait for a work of art to speak to us. We should give our senses a chance—a chance to react without prejudice to the language of form and colour. A work of art is something we can see : something we can touch : in music, something we can hear. Sensation is the basis of it all.

Not every critic of art will agree with me, but to ask people to begin looking for profound human emotions, tragic experiences, religious consolation or political enthusiasm in painted canvas or carved stone seems to me like asking them to indulge in a new kind of crystal-gazing. And it leads to the same kind of illusion and disappointment. I realize that there is such a thing as religious art : there is also metaphysical poetry and even music which is said to express the subtleties of dialectical materialism. But in the end there is only good art and bad art. And good art is something at once very simple and very profound. It is simple because it is sensuous : its pleasures are as primitive as the pleasures we get from the contemplation of a flower in the field or a shell picked up on the seashore. We do

## A Coat of Many Colours

not go far astray if we keep to that simple level of appreciation. But of course there is something more—that capacity which Blake described as being able “to see the world in a grain of sand, And heaven in a wild flower”. But that is obviously not an intellectual capacity. In æsthetics we call it an act of intuition, and beyond the innocence of sensation there is in art only the intuition of absolute values.

Does that seem to make the artist a very special kind of person? That is far from the impression I wish to give. Rather I believe that artistic potentialities are born with every human soul; it is only afterwards that our civilization destroys every trace of those potentialities. Nevertheless, artistic feeling cannot be altogether suppressed, and out it will come in all sorts of unrecognized ways—in the way a woman arranges a bunch of flowers in a vase, in the way a girl matches the colours of her clothes, in the way a man makes something (a radio-cabinet or a garden-seat) for his own use. The first thing to realize about art is that the artist is doing exactly the same kind of thing—arranging objects, matching colours, making something with his hands. What he makes may be something useful—a chair to sit on, a carpet to walk on, or a house to live in; but more often what we mean by art—a painting or a piece of sculpture—is not so obviously useful. We can, after all, “do without” pictures and pieces of sculpture in a sense in which we cannot do without chairs and carpets.

But “doing without” something is an economic question. The fact that people who have the money are willing to pay hundreds and even thousands of pounds to possess works of art means that they are paying for a pleasure or a satisfaction which they consider worth the price. What is this pleasure? What is this deep satisfaction? Fundamentally it is the pleasure we get from the sight of a well-arranged bunch of flowers or a well-dressed woman—that pleasure refined and intensified and made permanent on a

## The Language of the Eye

square of canvas. But it may be more than that. Even animals may be presumed to have sensations and to get joy from them ; but we human beings have also all those emotions and aspirations which arise from what I have called an intuition of absolute values ; and serving these emotions and aspirations we have a faculty which we call the imagination, by means of which we can re-create the past and see far into the future. All these mental or spiritual images and ideas can be expressed in pictures ; indeed, although they can also be expressed in words, they are never so clear and never so universal as when expressed in pictures. Words are peculiar to one country or race, and to one period of time ; but the picture is free from these limitations—it is a language which can be understood in all places and at all times.

Look at pictures, therefore, as a language of the eye. The artist is trying to say something to you. Above all, he is trying to say something to you which cannot be expressed in words. He is trying to say, not only " This is a bunch of flowers " or " This is the head of a girl " or " This is an Irish landscape " ; he is also saying something beyond the reach of ordinary language—indeed, he is no longer " saying " something to us but " doing " something to us. The colours he has put on his canvas in certain quantities and intensities are vibrating along our nerves, creating a sensation of pleasure in our minds. He has not merely recorded what the camera can record of a person or a landscape ; his imagination has pierced the superficial veil of appearances and revealed the inner structure of what the eye sees. He has done more : with his acute senses he has felt what we call the spirit of a landscape or the personality of a human being, and these immaterial qualities he has incorporated in the form and colour of his work. Sometimes he has turned away from the external world and has looked deep into his own mind,



## A Coat of Many Colours

and then tried to represent the images which arise spontaneously before "the inner eye". The records he brings back from his spiritual journeys are works of art no less "real" than the plain image of a flower or a face.

### 32. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*

IN any general view of the whole range of American literature, the first peak we discern is Hawthorne. There are, of course, many important writers of earlier date. There is the bulky theological literature of Puritanism, and there is an important political literature best represented by the names of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. More difficult to exclude is that first group of purely professional writers born in the eighties and nineties of the eighteenth century—Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and William Cullen Bryant. Whether justly or unjustly, none of these three authors is nowadays much read outside the country of his origin. To justify the exclusion of Emerson and Longfellow would need more ingenuity. They were almost exact contemporaries of Hawthorne's—all three were born between 1803 and 1807. Longfellow's reputation has declined disastrously during the past fifty years, and I doubt if even his *Hiawatha* would survive had not Coleridge-Taylor set it to music which makes it a suitable subject for amateur choral societies. Longfellow, Emerson, Irving, Bryant—there is perhaps some common quality in all these early American writers which explains why they have so little appeal to modern readers. I imagine it has something to do with their complacency, their serenity, their air of self-satisfaction. They are out of key with our unsettled and tragic existence, in a sense which is not true of Hawthorne and Poe. These two writers strike a more sombre note : we feel that they

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

may have some message, some consolation for the modern world. At least, there is a very pertinent message in Hawthorne. Poe may still appeal to us, but for a very different reason.

Hawthorne is often called a Puritan, sometimes a Calvinist. What is implied in such a statement needs a little more definition. A modern American writer has expressed the truth of the matter very neatly : Hawthorne "did not need to believe in Puritanism, for he understood it. He saw the empirical truth behind the Calvinist symbols. He recovered what Puritans professed but seldom practised—the spirit of piety, humility and tragedy in the face of the inscrutable ways of God."<sup>1</sup>

It must be emphasized that Hawthorne is in a very fundamental sense a Christian writer. He is not an artist for art's sake, like his contemporary Edgar Poe : he is a man using his artistic gifts to convey a certain philosophy of life. It is perfectly correct, it seems to me, to describe this philosophy not only as Christian, but as specifically Puritan. He was profoundly influenced by the greatest of our English Puritan writers, John Bunyan, and wrote at least one story in the manner of *Pilgrim's Progress*. There is no evidence that he had made any deep study of Calvinist theology : but that, we might say, was not necessary—Calvinist theology was the inescapable environment of his New England youth. From this theology he took two doctrines for illustration and elaboration—the doctrines of Original Sin and of Predestination. In their full austerity, both doctrines are gloomy and terrifying. One teaches that the human race has an innate tendency to sin, that it is involved in a curse from which no individual is wholly free, and for which every individual must suffer : the other teaches that all our actions are pre-ordained by

<sup>1</sup> Herbert W. Schneider : *The Puritan Mind*. (New York, 1930), p. 262.

## A Coat of Many Colours

an omnipotent and omniscient God, and that no effort on the part of the individual can affect his destiny. That Hawthorne accepted these doctrines in something like their original theological severity is shown, not only implicitly in his imaginative writings, but explicitly in various statements made in his letters and prefaces. In one letter, for example, he writes :

Vengeance and beneficence are things that God claims for Himself. His instruments have no consciousness of His purpose ; if they imagine they have, it is a pretty sure token that they are *not* His instruments. The good of others, like our own happiness, is not to be attained by direct effort, but incidentally. All history and observation confirm this. . . .

Now if Hawthorne had used his talent merely to construct fables illustrating these doctrines, we might have rated him high as a moralist, but he would not have been one of the world's great imaginative writers—he would not have been, using the word in its most general sense, a poet. What saved him was his objectivity—one of the essential æsthetic faculties. Hawthorne affirmed the objective existence of good and evil, but he did not distort reality to make the good always triumph, or the evil ever suffer punishment. The course of destiny is inevitable, but it is not rational. The very purpose of life is obscure, and all the careful constructions of the human intellect are vain. Feeling is more important than understanding, a good heart more to be desired than a keen mind. To his objectivity, Hawthorne added another quality, perhaps equally essential to the artist, his sympathy. Without sympathy, even evil cannot be faithfully depicted, and Hawthorne's evil geniuses—Chillingworth, Judge Pyncheon and Hollingsworth—like Milton's Satan, are his most convincing creations.

Objectivity and sympathy are, as it were, the main-

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

spring of Hawthorne's artistic method, motive powers which are not obviously on the surface of his tales and novels, but contained in their substance. The visible machinery, so obtrusive that some people would say it audibly *creaks*, is their symbolism. There is symbolism in the literal sense—the “scarlet letter”, for example, as the symbol of adultery—and Hawthorne's work is full of just this kind of allegorical device. It was one of the things he took over from Bunyan. Most of his “tales”, as distinct from the longer “romances”, are in reality fables in which the symbols are of more importance than the characters who, so to speak, manipulate them. There is one such tale, “The Artist of the Beautiful”, which is not only a typical example of this symbolical writing, but by implication criticizes it. A watchmaker has succeeded in creating a mechanical butterfly, more beautiful and more permanent than any of Nature's butterflies. He takes it as a bridal present to “the friend of his boyish years”, now married to a blacksmith, himself a symbol of “main strength and reality”. There is already a child of this marriage, another symbol compounded half of innocence and half of scepticism. The butterfly represents, in its creator's own words, “the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful”. When released the butterfly makes various symbolic flights, alighting on the hands of those present and reacting in appropriate fashion to their characters. Finally it makes for the infant. It is no ordinary infant: there is “a certain odd expression of sagacity” in its eyes, and the butterfly, as if conscious of something not entirely congenial in the child's nature, alternately sparkles and grows dim. It flutters away and seems to be avoiding the child:

but while it still hovered in the air, the little child of strength, with his grandsire's sharp and shrewd expression in his face, made a snatch at the marvellous insect and

## A Coat of Many Colours

compressed it in his hand. . . . The blacksmith, by main force, unclosed the infant's hand, and found within the palm a small heap of glittering fragments, whence the mystery of beauty had fled for ever.

As for the artist who had created this miracle,

he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labour, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.

I believe that this particular tale of Hawthorne's is the author's deepest comment on his own work. He realized that he was only creating symbols inconsistent with his sceptical outlook on life. He realized that his works of art would not bear the test of reality. But nevertheless they did reveal, if only through the reactions they provoked, the reality of men's souls, the truth of the human heart. Works of art, his own works among them, are bright glittering toys which have imbibed a spiritual essence—"call it magnetism or what you will". Only the innocent can accept them for what they are: the rest of humanity must be judged by them, finding in their partial enjoyment an index to the coldness or impurity of their hearts.

Hawthorne wrote four longer "romances", as he preferred to call them, and a large number of shorter tales and sketches. His own favourite romance seems to have been *The House of Seven Gables*, but the general verdict would probably be in favour of *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne wrote nothing more intensely vivid than the final scene in *The Scarlet Letter*. Dickens and Thomas Hardy were to write famous scaffold scenes, but Hawthorne's is the supreme one, completely dignified and immensely tragic. *The House of Seven Gables* is the 'most "finished" of

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

these romances : it has more variety, both in the writing and in the characterization. But I would put in a special plea for *The Blithedale Romance*, which I believe was Robert Browning's favourite. It is less imaginative : it is, in fact, the perfectly realistic description of one of those ill-fated attempts to found an ideal community in an imperfect world. It was based on the history of a socialist experiment at Brook Farm in which Hawthorne himself had participated. Like all his works, it has tiresomely facetious passages. But it is the least gloomy and the least satirical of Hawthorne's stories, the one most directly relevant to life, and in spite of its tragic ending, it is suffused with some quality of brightness or serenity which is an effect, I believe, of its style.

Hawthorne's prose style is by no means infallible. In some of his more descriptive sketches it is heavy, angular and full of those elegant variations which are the mark of a provincial writer. And Hawthorne was at times a provincial writer. He saved himself by his clear realization of the primacy of feeling. It is sometimes said that the secret of a good style is clear thinking. It is true that a logical mind inevitably avoids many of the pitfalls of bad writing, but other qualities are necessary for the art of prose : a keen eye, for example, which is quicker even than thought, and a sensuous feeling for the individuality of words—their sound and size and history. And there is something more still—something which implies a perception of the wholeness and integrity of a situation, so that not only words and sentences, but the orchestration of these into a greater and more sustained unity becomes possible. Hawthorne had this kind of sensibility—not infallibly, I have said, and perhaps not very frequently. But he is secure in his main achievements : a rare transformation of the moral sense into the objective reality of art, and the addition to that reality of the unique products

## A Coat of Many Colours

of a mind "magnificently haunted" and hauntingly expressive.

### 33. *Gerard Manley Hopkins*

I ONCE expressed the opinion that no poet of recent times is likely to exercise such a potent influence as Hopkins—meaning by that an influence on the structural development of English verse. That was before I had read his letters to Robert Bridges, Canon Dixon and Coventry Patmore, which so fully reveal the purposiveness of his experiments in prosody. Now that I have read these letters, I feel no inclination to modify my statement. Hopkins understood the technique of English poetry as no poet since Dryden had understood it; Dryden whom he described so well in one of these letters as "the most masculine of our poets; his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language". Such a description looks innocent enough, but it implies the great realization that poetry must start from the nature of a language—must flow with a language's inflexions and quantities, must, in a word, be *natural*. Such was the secret of Greek poetry, and of Anglo-Saxon poetry; and it is the virtue of most of our poets that they instinctively reject Italianate rhythms, and other foreign impositions, and fall into this natural rhythm, which Hopkins called sprung rhythm. "Presumptuous jugglery", Bridges called it, misspelling in his indignation. Hopkins replied that he used sprung rhythm

because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining, as it seems to me, opposite and, one wd. have thought, incompatible excellences, markedness

## Gerard Manley Hopkins

of rhythm—that is rhythm's self—and naturalness of expression.

But Bridges was never convinced ; I doubt if he ever really saw the point of the discovery—his own later experiments in the measure were feeble ; he certainly never realized the importance of it. The possibility that through Hopkins a renaissance of English poetry would come about would have seemed fantastic to him ; but now that possibility is being realized, and before another generation has passed I doubt if any other measure but sprung rhythm will be in use.

Hopkins was a man of quite exceptional nobility of mind, a man, too, of tender feeling and frank impulsive affection. His real quality was that chastity of mind which he describes in one of his best letters (Letter XCIX to Bridges) :

. . . if a gentleman feels that to be what we call a gentleman is a thing essentially higher than without being a gentleman to be ever so great an artist or thinker or if, to put it another way, an artist or thinker feels that were he to become in those ways ever so great he would still essentially be lower than a gentleman that was no artist and no thinker—and yet to be a gentleman is but on the brim of morals and rather a thing of manners than of morals properly—then how much more must art and philosophy and manners and breeding and everything else in the world be below the least degree of true virtue. This is that chastity of mind which seems to lie at the very heart and be the parent of all other good, the seeing at once what is best, the holding to that, and the not allowing anything else whatever to be even heard pleading to the contrary.

But Hopkins realized that this was “no snatching-matter”. “The quality of a gentleman is so very fine a thing that it seems to me one should not be at all hasty in concluding that one possesses it.” His own humility was perfect, but he knew that there was an injunction on all poets and artists to let their light shine before men. “I



## A Coat of Many Colours

would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works." But for himself it was different ; in joining the Society of Jesus he had deliberately renounced fame. In 1881 he told Dixon that he had destroyed all he had written before he entered the Society, and that at first he had meant to write no more. Then his superior suggested that he should write an ode on the wreck of the *Deutschland*, which he did with the results we know. He doubted the wisdom of writing any more poetry unless, so to speak, ordered to do so ; but came to a compromise :

However, I shall, in my present mind, continue to compose, as occasion shall fairly allow, which I am afraid will be seldom and indeed for some years past has been scarcely ever, and let what I produce wait and take its chance ; for a very spiritual man once told me that with things like composition the best sacrifice was not to destroy one's work but to leave it entirely to be disposed of by obedience.

It is easy to regret that Hopkins's conscience would not allow him to spend time on poetry, but we must remember that the poet was the man—that his poetic make was complementary to his religious make, and that to ask for a different man is to ask for a different poet. If he had not been a priest, Hopkins would undoubtedly have written more verse—perhaps as much as Bridges or Browning or Swinburne. But he would not necessarily have been a better poet, and as it is, his small harvest is so rich and golden, that we would not exchange it for all the pallid stacks of verse piled up by his contemporaries. Dixon was distressed by the open conflict of religion and poetry, but respected the decision taken by Hopkins. What Bridges thought we do not know, but he had no sympathy

## The Poetry and Prose of Painting

for the religious life of his friend, even a definite antipathy. One wonders on what the friendship subsisted, so little were Hopkins's profoundest feelings appreciated by Bridges. But friendship is perhaps never solidly grounded on intellectual interests ; Hopkins had known Bridges for ten years before he discovered (and then from a review !) that his friend wrote poetry. We can assume, therefore, that the attraction was instinctive, even physical. How otherwise could Hopkins have tolerated the conceit, the pedantry, the complete lack of perception that was the return for all his frankness, humility and grace ? Bridges has cautiously destroyed his side of the correspondence, but that very caution is significant. A man has not such a care for his reputation but from what we call a good conceit of himself, which is a fault even Hopkins charged him with.

### 34. *The Poetry and Prose of Painting*

SOME of the difficulties experienced in the appreciation of the visual arts, especially the art of painting, arise from an unnecessary simplification in our habits of thought about the subject. We think of certain tools and materials, of brushes and canvas and oil-paint, and we expect that the art produced by these tools and materials should be, in spite of all its variety, one art ; if we admit distinctions and species, they are due to variations in the tools and materials—the substitution of tempera or water-colour for oil-paint, of paper for canvas, and so on. But there is really no more reason why the art produced by brushes and paint and canvas should be *one* art than there is reason why the art produced by pen and ink and words should be one art. Any adequate literary criticism has long since realized that the distinction between poetry and prose is an absolute one—that though the same material, words, is used, the

## A Coat of Many Colours

use made of the words, and the psychology of the user, differs totally in each activity.

These interdepartmental analogies are very doubtful modes of criticism, as Lessing long ago showed. The whole field of criticism is obscured by a free and inexact borrowing of terminology by the critics of one art from the critics of another, and mental poverty is the only excuse. As a rule critics should not write about the colour of music, the rhythm of painting, the cadence of poetry, and so on. I am sure I have sinned with the rest, but my transgressions have always been followed by repentance. On the present occasion I sin deliberately, hoping that the end will justify the means. Finally we may be faced with the necessity of inventing a new terminology, and then our path will once more be narrow but straight.

A distinction has often been made between the magical and the scientific use of words. We may put the same distinction in a way more useful for my present purposes by saying that prose is an art which aspires to exact and economic statement, poetry the charged and electric use of words for emotional effect. If we wish to convey the objective nature of things, our best medium is prose, because then the words transmit their meaning and nothing but their meaning ; they do not draw attention to themselves. But if we wish to convey, not the objective nature of things, but the subjective associations which words have in our minds, then we use words which are full of indefinite subtleties of meaning and secondary aspects ; and such words are always poetic, though they may not be in verse. Verse is a more concentrated and ordered arrangement of such words, and we may even be tempted to use such words for their own sake, that is to say, quite independently of their logical meaning, because they have an inexplicable or magic effect which we cannot explain, but which is justified because it gives pleasure.

## The Poetry and Prose of Painting

In the same way the artist may take up his brushes and paint with one of two quite distinct intentions. He may desire to reproduce on his canvas an exact picture of the objective world, such as he conceives it to be given to him by the mechanism of his sight. That has been the crude intention of many artists, even since the invention of a rival means in photography. But the camera, of course, is limited ; it cannot render colour with any exactitude, and even its reactions to light and perspective are not quite those of the human eye. And there is still scope for the prose painter in the selection of his material, the arrangement of his objects, the invention of themes, and in the creation of what is literally a personal point of view. A good deal of post-Renaissance painting is prose painting of this kind, and whilst it may be as drab and Dickensian as Frith's "Derby Day", it can also be as exquisite and Paterian as a still-life by Chardin or Manet.

Alternatively, the painter may start with quite a different intention. He will leave to others the exact record of the dimensions and actuality of objects in space, their particular colouring and lighting. He is more interested in using his colours for their own sake, and for the sake of the moods they can evoke in association with the things he depicts. Whilst, therefore, taking his theme from the actual world, he will so use that theme, vary it and even distort it, that the final picture he is left with may be of no use as a record or reproduction of the world, but will have its own inherent values of colour, and of colour formally organised. Indeed, the painter, like the poet, may become so interested in the materials of his craft that he may begin to use them independently of all reproductive intention, just for the sake of the enchantment they convey as objects of pure sensation. This is the stage to which modern painting has advanced, and its advance has, of course, been made concurrently with analogous advances in the other arts. But in general

## A Coat of Many Colours

it is not a case of one art influencing another ; it is the human sensibility itself that grows more inventive, more courageous, more complicated and refined.

The analogy between certain kinds of painting and poetry could be pushed into much greater detail. Just as poetry is subdivided into various species, such as the epic, the lyric, the ode, the sonnet, dramatic and narrative poetry, so poetic painting could be similarly subdivided. The analogies would not now be exact, but who can doubt that Poussin, for example, expresses himself in the ode, Delacroix in the epic, Giorgione in the lyrical ballad, Boucher in the simple, Cézanne in the sonnet. But the essential distinction is the broad one between painting with a prose intention, and painting with a poetic intention. Both methods of painting are legitimate, but our criticism will continue to be confused unless we bear this distinction in mind, and apply standards of value appropriate to each kind.

### 35. *Doctor Faustus*

I AM afraid I cannot lay claim to any expert knowledge of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, but only to an exceptional love of it. This dates from the time I was a student at a provincial university, where among the books prescribed for the course I was taking was this play of Marlowe's. Up till then Marlowe had been merely a name to me—I had probably read a few quotations in histories and anthologies, but I had never read a whole play, much less the whole of his works. All who have been students in those "red-brick" institutions of learning know well the cruel rack of the curriculum. To get through it all within the year, time had to be rationed as severely as later we learned to ration our butter and our sugar. The prescribed

## Doctor Faustus

books had to be kept to, and a week or two was all the student could afford for any particular author. I will not discuss the merits of this system, but I must confess that I ignored it. Incidentally, I also failed in my examination, and if I had to fix the blame for my failure on any particular person, it would be on Kit Marlowe.

Not marching in the fields of Thrasimen,  
Where Mars did mate the warlike Carthagens ;  
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love,  
In courts of kings, where state is over-turn'd ;  
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,  
Intends our Muse to vaunt his heavenly verse :

—to this day I cannot read these opening lines of *Doctor Faustus* without reviving the vivid emotions with which I read them thirty years ago. Marlowe is the poet of youth. There is something in his eager enquiring spirit, something in the harmony and magic of his words, something which I would call his sense of glory, which goes straight to our hearts as we stand on the threshold of life. It is more than the mere romance of his themes, more than the general fervour and colour of the English Renaissance. Spenser could give us these, Shakespeare himself. But Marlowe could give the thirsty mind of a youth something more—something which even Shakespeare could not give. In the course of this note I want to try and discover what that unique quality is in Marlowe. But first let me observe that it is not a quality which has been discovered in him by our particular age ; it is an eternal quality, and was never better described than by his contemporary Michael Drayton, in those lines which I hope are not too well-known to quote :

Neat Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs,  
Had in him those brave translunary things  
That the first poets had : his raptures were  
All air and fire, which made his verses clear :  
For that fine madness still he did retain  
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.

## A Coat of Many Colours

"Neat Marlowe"—the epithet is appropriate to his verse, but not to his life, which was untidy, obscure, and tragically short. Thirty years ago, when I was a student, we knew very little of this life. We knew that he had been born at Canterbury in the same year as Shakespeare, 1564, and that his father was a shoemaker. We knew that from the King's School in Canterbury he proceeded to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, taking his B.A. degree in 1584 and his M.A. three or four years later. We knew that his first play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, had been produced in 1587, and that six years later the dramatist had been stabbed to death in a tavern brawl in Deptford. We also knew that when he died he was under suspicion of heresy or atheism, and that his case was about to be investigated by the Privy Council. The rest was largely a field for ingenious speculation.

But the very obscurity and teasing mystery of Marlowe's life was to inspire some very persistent investigators, and as a result our knowledge of the poet's life has, during the past twenty years or so, been enormously increased. *The Death of Christopher Marlowe*, published in 1925, is Dr. Leslie Hotson's account of the remarkable discoveries he made in the Record Office and elsewhere, and is only one of several exciting pieces of detection we owe to this literary sleuthhound. Luckily for all students of Marlowe, the results of all these discoveries have now been finally gathered together in the standard biography of the poet by Professor Boas.

The most surprising discovery made by these scholars is that some time between taking his B.A. degree in 1583-4 and proceeding to his M.A. degree in 1587, Marlowe was engaged by the Privy Council on what we should now call secret service. For this service he had been "defamed by those that are ignorant in th' affaires he went about", and as a result the University authorities made some

## Doctor Faustus

difficulties about allowing him to take his M.A. degree. Whereupon the Privy Council intervened, certified that Marlowe had been employed in matters touching the benefit of his country, and that in all his actions he had behaved himself orderly and discreetly. Marlowe was then given his degree, under a "grace" dated 31 March, 1587. That was the end of his academic studies, for he abandoned the clerical career for which his scholarship was provided, proceeded to London, and by the 10 November in this same year had not only written but had produced on the stage the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*. He was still only twenty-three years old.

Two years later Marlowe was arrested and put into Newgate Prison for being involved in an affray in the course of which he had attacked a certain William Bradley. Marlowe had eventually desisted from the fight, whereupon a certain Thomas Watson intervened, and setting about Bradley with sword and dagger, chased him into a ditch and killed him. Marlowe was bound over, as we say, and eventually discharged, having spent only a fortnight in prison. The Thomas Watson with whom he was associated in this affray was a fellow poet, dramatist and translator, but we know nothing more about his relations with Marlowe.

Four years pass, during which Marlowe writes *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *Edward II*, and *Doctor Faustus*. We are not without news of Marlowe's activities during these years, but we must pass over them to deal with the tragic events of 1593. In May of that year the Privy Council directed a body of commissioners appointed by the Lord Mayor to arrest and examine any persons suspected of lately setting up "divers lewd and mutinous libells" within the city of London, to search their chambers for writings or papers, and, in default of confession, to "put them to the torture in Bridewell". One of the first people to be arrested by this Elizabethan gestapo was the dramatist,



## A Coat of Many Colours

Thomas Kyd. Under torture Kyd asserted that an atheistical tract discovered among his papers belonged to Marlowe, and on being persuaded to amplify his statement, made a general accusation against Marlowe, whom he described as "one so irreligious . . . intemperate and of a cruel heart". I shall deal with this charge of atheism presently, but first let us follow the events to their fateful close. On 18 May the Privy Council issued a warrant for Marlowe's arrest. The plague was raging in London and the theatres were closed. Marlowe was staying with his friend Thomas Walsingham at Scadbury in Kent, and there, after reporting to the Privy Council, he was for some reason allowed to stay; he was bound over, but not apprehended. We can only assume that Walsingham, who was a brother of the late Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, had sufficient influence to protect his friend. And it is possible that the Privy Council were so much indebted to their secret agent, Christopher Marlowe, that they wished to deal with him leniently.

Ten days later, on the 30 May, 1593, Marlowe repaired to a tavern at Deptford Strand in the company of three other men—Robert Poley, Nicholas Skeres and Ingram Frizer. There Christopher Marlowe was stabbed to death by Ingram Frizer. According to the account accepted by the jury at the inquest which followed, a quarrel had arisen after supper about the payment of the reckoning. Marlowe was lying on a bed, and Frizer was sitting between Poley and Skeres at a table nearby, his back towards Marlowe. Marlowe drew Frizer's dagger, which he was wearing at his back, and gave him two wounds in his head, two inches long and a quarter deep. Frizer, pinned between Skeres and Poley, struggled to get back his dagger and in self-defence dealt Marlowe a blow above the right eye from which he immediately died.

All kinds of inconsistencies—logical, strategical and

## Doctor Faustus

anatomical—have been discovered in the evidence accepted by the coroner's jury, and some critics have gone so far as to suggest that it was a frame-up, and that Marlowe was really the victim of a political murder. We know that Poley was a government agent, and a double-crosser who had spent a year or two as a prisoner in the Tower of London. There is evidence that Skeres, too, was a spy, and Frizer was also a shady character. But then, so was Marlowe. In addition to the charges of manslaughter, atheism and blasphemy, there are contemporary accusations of homosexuality and false coinage. In all this we must discount the jealousy of rivals and the fanaticism of public informers. But by no conceivable process of exculpation can we convert our poet into an angel. The best we can say of him is that like so many Elizabethans, he anticipated the Nietzschean philosophy and "lived dangerously". He died ingloriously.

To speak of Marlowe having a philosophy is no metaphor. He not only lived dangerously, but also thought dangerously. Beneath the phrases in which he was currently accused of atheism, we detect the searchings of a restless intellect, and on this aspect of Marlowe's life we now have far more information than was available to a student thirty years ago. Here let me mention one more book: it is *The School of Night*—a study in the literary relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh, by M. C. Bradbrook.<sup>1</sup> It is a short book but it is a brilliant one, and I know of nothing which so well conveys the intellectual atmosphere of Marlowe's time. "The School of Night", so called by Shakespeare in *Love's Labour's Lost*, which play is largely a skit on the subject, is the name given to a group of intellectuals of whom Sir Walter Raleigh was the acknowledged leader, and Marlowe and Chapman the chief members known to fame. There were other members, and one of them, Thomas Harriot, a

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge University Press, 1936.

## A Coat of Many Colours

mathematician and "master of all true and essential knowledge" as Chapman called him, was probably the animator of the whole group. Unfortunately no work of Harriot's survives to throw light on his philosophical views, and we shall look in vain for any consistent doctrine common to all the members of the group. The common charge against them was "atheism", but that was a label of no more significance than "bolshevism" in our own days. Indeed, a comparison with our own situation will perhaps bring us nearer to an understanding of Marlowe's attitude than any direct approach. To-day, for example, we get a little nearer the reality if we talk about "marxism" rather than "bolshevism". We can then relate our views to a definite philosophy. In the same way, we shall get nearer to the Elizabethan reality if for "atheism" we substitute "machiavellism". As Miss Bradbrook has pointed out, Machiavelli was the fashionable thinker among Elizabethan intellectuals, just as Marx has been fashionable among our own intellectuals. The parallel is very close. The distance that separated Marlowe and his contemporaries from Machiavelli was exactly the same as that which separates Marx from the poets and dramatists of our own time. Both Machiavelli and Marx offer a theory of the state in which is involved a philosophy of life. They appeal, that is to say, to the active as well as to the contemplative side of our natures, and that is very important at a time when everything is in a state of flux, and young poets feel that their fate is to be men of action as well as men of imagination.

Of Marlowe's obsession with Machiavelli there can be no doubt. Greene, in his *Groats-worth of Wit* written in 1592, addressing Marlowe asks: "Is it pestilent Machivilian pollicie that thou hast studied?" But we need not go outside Marlowe's own works for evidence. Machiavelli himself is introduced as Prologue-speaker in the *Jew of*

## Doctor Faustus

*Malta*, and not only the character of Barabas in this play, but also that of the Duke of Guise in *The Massacre at Paris*, are deliberately conceived as Machiavellian figures, indeed, as reincarnations of the sinister Italian :

Albeit the world think Machiavel is dead,  
Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps ;  
And, now the Guise is dead, is come from France,  
To view this land, and frolic with his friends.  
To some perhaps my name is odious ;  
But such as love me, guard me from their tongues,  
And let them know that I am Machiavel,  
And weigh not men, and therefore not men's words.  
Admir'd I am of those that hate me most :  
Though some speak openly against my books,  
Yet will they read me, and thereby attain  
To Peter's chair ; and when they cast me off,  
Are poison'd by my climbing followers.  
I count religion but a childish toy,  
And hold there is no sin but ignorance . . .

It would be possible to write at much greater length on the Machiavellian element in Marlowe's work, but I must pass on to other aspects, merely observing that, however much our dramatist may pretend to ridicule or refute the Machiavellian doctrine, he betrays at every step a fascination which does not fall far short of full sympathy.

The other aspect of the *School of Night* which concerns Marlowe is represented by Harriot, the intimate friend of Raleigh. He is famous as a mathematician, but he was much more than that. He was a very considerable astronomer, and a tireless experimenter in all the physical sciences. He accompanied Raleigh to Virginia in 1585 and stayed a year there, publishing on his return a scientific survey of the natural resources of the newly discovered country. What Harriot represented, in short, was the scientific attitude of mind, typified by Galileo, which was prepared to question all things, including the dogmas of

## A Coat of Many Colours

organized Christianity. *The School of Night* was the English embodiment of this Renaissance spirit of enquiry, and it might seem to us nowadays that the things they questioned were not really fundamental. They questioned the historicity of the Book of Genesis ; they suggested natural explanations of miracles, and in an extreme case, such as Marlowe's, they might have questioned the divinity of Christ. But that was more than sufficient to have themselves branded as blasphemers, heretics and atheists ; and we should remember that such charges were mortally dangerous, and that people were still burnt at the stake for professing unorthodox views. In 1589, the year in which Marlowe wrote the *Jew of Malta*, Francis Kett, who had been a tutor of the same college at Cambridge, was burnt at Norwich on a charge of heresy. This should make us realize that Marlowe was not playing with abstractions, that he was not the equivalent of a parlour-communist of our days ; if he was playing with anything it was with death.

And so we come to *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, to give it its full title, Marlowe's last play, probably written, as Dr. Boas has shown, within the twelve months preceding the poet's death. The theme which Marlowe chose with such sure instinct was to be given its final form and consistency two centuries later by Goethe, but Marlowe deserves the credit, which Goethe himself was willing to give to him, of having first seen the significance of the theme—the significance which was to make it the great typical myth of the modern age. The original source of the myth is a German prose narrative published at Frankfort-on-the-Main in 1587. There is a little doubt about the exact date of the first edition of the English translation which Marlowe used, but the latest research points to May, 1592, and unless we presume that Marlowe had access to the manuscript of the translation,

## Doctor Faustus

or could read German, this gives us the earliest date for the writing of the play. The first performance of which we have a record took place on 30 September, 1594, sixteen months after Marlowe's death.

What is there in the story of Dr. Faustus which first made an appeal to Marlowe, and then to countless audiences all over Europe, until Goethe took up the theme and deepened it and developed it into its final shape? Marlowe tells us in the Prologue, spoken by a Chorus. He describes how Faustus went to the University of Wittenberg and there profited so much by his studies in divinity

That shortly he was grac'd with Doctor's name,  
Excelling all, and sweetly can dispute  
In th' heavenly matters of theology ;  
Till swoln with cunning, of a self-conceit,  
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,  
And, melting, heavens conspir'd his over-throw ;  
For, falling to a devilish exercise,  
And glutted now with learning's golden gifts,  
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy ;  
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,  
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss . . .

It is the peculiar problem of the Renaissance intellectual. He had discovered a new freedom, the freedom of his mind. He had rejected the authority of the Church and was ready to explore the whole universe with his new instrument, the telescope :

O, what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, and omnipotence,  
Is promised to the studious artizan !  
All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command : emperors and kings  
Are but obey'd in their several provinces,  
But his dominion that exceeds in this,  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man . . .

But with this new-found freedom comes a new feeling of isolation and doubt, and it is this sense of insecurity,

## A Coat of Many Colours

represented by Mephistophiles, which drives Faustus to his doom. When the devils gather to watch the last fateful scene, Mephistophiles observes of his victim :

Fond worldling, now his heart-blood dries with grief,  
His conscience kills it and his labouring brain  
Begets a world of idle fantasies,  
To over-reach the Devil ; but all in vain,  
His store of pleasures must be sauc'd with pain.

Faustus dies in the agony of his self-sufficiency, and out of that agony, at the last utter gasp, comes the cry : " I'll burn my books ! " But it is too late ; " the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus " ; and it only remains for the chorus to declaim their lovely epitaph :

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burn'd is Apollo's laurel-bough,  
That sometimes grew within this learn'd man.

The significance of this tragedy is almost inexhaustible, but I would like to emphasize only two further aspects, one personal to Marlowe, one still valid for us. As for the personal aspect, I only want to repeat that this conflict between " sweet divinity " and " cunning ", to use the terms most used in the play, was Marlowe's own conflict—the dilemma which afflicted all the intellectuals of that time. It is this actuality which caused Marlowe to write the play with such feeling and poetic power. But Marlowe's problem is still our problem. We have not yet discovered how to use our new-found freedom, and Faust is still our representative myth. Afraid of his freedom, modern man has fallen back again and again on some form of authoritarianism—on Lutherism, Calvinism, Puritanism, Marxism, Fascism. Is it impossible for man to realize his destiny, to master his environment, to get rid of his feeling of isolation and insecurity ? To these questions those who still retain faith in mankind have a positive answer, but I need not insist on it here. I only

## Doctor Faustus

want to point out that this play by an Elizabethan poet written 350 years ago is not so remote as at first sight it might seem.

Swinburne summed up the significance of Marlowe, in words which, exalted as they are, I do not find exaggerative :

The place and value of Christopher Marlowe as a leader among English poets [wrote Swinburne] it would be almost impossible for historical criticism to over-estimate. To none of them all, perhaps, have so many of the greatest among them been so deeply and so directly indebted. Nor was ever any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmixedly an influence for the good. He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare into the right way of work ; his music, in which there is no echo of any man's before him, found its own echo in the more prolonged but hardly more exalted harmony of Milton's. He is the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all our poetic literature. Before him there was neither genuine blank verse nor a genuine tragedy in our language. After his arrival the way was prepared, the paths were made straight, for Shakespeare.

### 36. *Toulouse-Lautrec*

DESPITE his affectation for English things—English animals and English sports, English drinks and English music-hall actresses—Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec has never been a popular artist in this country. During his lifetime an exhibition of his works was held in London, and he came over expecting appreciation in a country for which he himself had so much sympathy ; but he found only a complete lack of understanding, complete boredom, and intolerant policemen. He was quite cured of his anglo-mania. Actually, even to-day, Toulouse-Lautrec is a type of artist we find most difficult to admire, and though his



## A Coat of Many Colours

paintings have been seen in London more frequently of late, we have not yet done justice to an artist who is surely as great as some of his contemporaries we have accepted and honoured—Monet and Gauguin, for example—and who has been one of the most powerful influences in the development of modern painting. He was Picasso's first master, and even Rouault's.

The English attitude to Lautrec is doubtless determined by the subject-matter of his paintings. It would be confirmed by the details of his life were they known, but the extent of most people's knowledge is probably, and as it happens, rightly, suggested by the paintings. He painted what he experienced. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec belonged to an ancient aristocratic family, "comtes de Toulouse-Lautrec, vicomtes d'Albi, seigneurs de Saint-Germier et de Monfa". During the Middle Ages they dominated the whole Midi, and their power was such that they could defy the Pope and defend their subjects, the famous Albigeois heretics, against his edicts. They prolonged their feudal habits well into the nineteenth century. The painter's father was an extraordinary eccentric who preferred to live naked in a tent in the grounds of his castle. He fed almost exclusively on truffles cooked in milk. By night he shot rats with a pistol; he had his paper read to him by a servant, who also had to taste all food and wine before his master took it. At the same time, this amiable savage was, when it suited him, a perfect gentleman who frequented the Jockey Club and the highest ranks of Parisian society. It is related of him that once, for a bet of two hundred louis, he took a flying leap on horseback over a passing cab. When a boy Henri broke both his legs, and in spite of every kind of remedy, the legs ceased to grow. But the upper part of his body developed normally—his head and shoulders were even excessively large; with the result that he had not even

## Toulouse-Lautrec

the miniature proportions of a dwarf. He was grotesque Yvette Guilbert's description of him is horribly vivid :

A dark, huge head, with a very ruddy complexion, a black beard, a greasy, oily skin, a nose big enough for two faces, and a mouth—a mouth that cut across his face from cheek to cheek, like a great open wound. Flat, thick, flabby, purple lips surrounded this dreadful and obscene chasm. I was aghast, until I looked into Lautrec's eyes. How beautiful they were, how large, how wide, rich in colour, astonishingly brilliant and luminous.

It is important to realize the nature of his deformity because it explains the kind of life he led ; and the kind of life he led explains the kind of pictures he painted. He did not become bitter and waspish like Pope ; he accepted his fate with a certain zest ; it might even be said that he exploited his misfortune. An incident related by Yvette Guilbert is revealing : “ One day, as I was looking over some of the drawings he had made of me, I became annoyed because he had distorted me to such an extent and said : ‘ Really, you are the genius of deformity.’ In a voice as sharp-edged as a knife he answered : ‘ But—naturally ! ’ ” This suggests that he used his art to get his own back, as we say—to point out that the distance between the normal and the abnormal was not so great as the world complacently supposed.

Whatever the psychological effect of his deformity, it is certain that it determined the course of his practical life. It is doubtful whether he would have become a painter at all if he had been strong and active ; and if he had been a painter with a normal body he would certainly have painted different subjects. For it was his deformity, which deprived him of normal relationships with women, that drove him to the underworld of Paris. Once there, he adopted it as his world, the peculiar theme of his art. The brothels he had visited casually he presently began to live in, so that he

## A Coat of Many Colours

might study the inmates with realistic detachment. Besides the brothels there were the cabarets, the cafés, the theatre and the circus ; the singers, the dancers, the actors and actresses—these are his exclusive matériel. He never painted landscapes and could not understand why anyone did. It is true that he painted some remarkable portraits, but these were generally of his friends, for the ordinary patron would not have tolerated his realism. And almost by chance he became a pioneer in one department of commercial art—the poster. Pictorial posters did exist before his time, but the coloured poster as we know it to-day was practically invented by Jules Chéret, an immediate predecessor of Lautrec's, and it was Lautrec who, profiting by Chéret's experiments in colour reproduction, first made the poster an individual work of art.

Lautrec's talent was modest. He contributed little or nothing to the formal or technical development of modern painting. He seems to have recognized the genius of Van Gogh, and he was a fanatical worshipper of Degas. But he was contemptuous of Impressionists like Monet, and blind to the significance of Cézanne. The importance of his art derives mainly from its subject-matter, and this subject-matter from his life of dissipation. If he had been a better man he would almost certainly have been a less interesting painter. There have been, of course, painters who used the same subject-matter with a sentimental or a pornographic intention. Lautrec is redeemed by his realism ; and his realism as we have seen, was probably a result of his deformity.

Prostitutes, comédiennes, clowns ; cafés, bars, theatres, race-courses—there is plenty of scope for realism here, but is it the whole of reality ? To be fair to Toulouse-Lautrec, we must remember his portraits, which are an important part of his work. But he himself once said :  
"Je ne fais pas de portraits. Je peins mes amis les chiens,

## Toulouse-Lautrec

et mes amis les hommes"—which is as much as to say that he did not distinguish between his portraits and the rest of his work. He painted what he saw around him, and that was, for the greater part of his life, the Paris of Montparnasse. Naturally, it must be admitted that Montparnasse is not what we mean by reality. But it is not the scope or extent of an artist's vision that matters, but its intensity. The world Toulouse-Lautrec saw he saw without passion, without distortion, simply and sympathetically. It was not he that was cynical, but his world. Somewhere in the unedifying sequence a light breaks out, as of truth or compassion, and lifts the art out of its dreary background. And as one of his friends, Tristan Bernard, said of him: "Lautrec only seems supernatural because he was natural in the extreme." To be natural in the extreme is the definition of genius: it is to possess that quality of vision or sensibility which only a few men in any generation possess, and who thereby enable other men to look on the world with new eyes.

It is instructive to compare him with Baudelaire, who was near to him in spirit. Baudelaire was perhaps not so spontaneously creative as Lautrec: he was much more reflective and therefore much more critical in his reactions. But the art of both men has the same basis in sensuality, and the same power which comes from accepting one's obsession without fear. The difference between them, due to Baudelaire's reflective nature, lies in their moral attitude. Baudelaire was not exactly a moralist, but neither was he, like Lautrec, a remorseless realist. Remorse is always the residue of moralism.

Moralism is native to most men (the categorical imperative, the inner check—we have many names for its hidden power) and when it is absent, in a tyrant or an artist, we are apt to regard the exception as a monster. I am not prepared to argue the case for the tyrant (we now

## A Coat of Many Colours

call him dictator) because I am not prepared to admit that moralism should be excluded from public life. But I am sure that it has nothing to do with art, and that most of our mistakes in the appreciation of art—our so-called English lack of taste—is due to nothing so much as this age-long confusion. Painters like Lautrec, poets like Baudelaire, confront in this country not a temporary prejudice, but a formidable tradition.

### 37. *Wordsworth's Remorse*

IN 1816 Shelley published a sonnet to Wordsworth. Its mixture of admiration and regret expresses an attitude towards that great poet which I still find reasonable :

Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know  
That things depart which never may return :  
Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,  
Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.  
These common woes I feel. One loss is mine  
Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.  
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine  
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar :  
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood  
Above the blind and battling multitude :  
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave  
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—  
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,  
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

Shelley was then twenty-four ; Wordsworth forty-six. The older poet had lived through the great days of the French Revolution, and had had some direct contact with the Revolutionary leaders. By the time Shelley had become mentally aware of the issues involved, the Revolution was over and reaction had set in. It is possible to argue that Shelley at this time was an enthusiastic young man who would, like Wordsworth, become sober in his

## Wordsworth's Remorse

middle age. But six years later, when Shelley died, there was no sign of the process ; and the argument is superficial because it avoids the philosophical issues which are involved. There were many contemporaries of Wordsworth—Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, for example—who did not change their attitude towards the principles which inspired the French Revolution. What, then, in Wordsworth's particular case, was the cause of his reaction ?

It is a pertinent question because, with this change of political attitude went a change in poetic quality, and a change for the worse. That is a dogmatic statement, but I do not think it would be challenged by any of Wordsworth's admirers. I personally take the view that these two processes of change were connected in Wordsworth's development, and elsewhere I have given my argument full scope.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be argued that the growth of discretion, or of rational judgement, has necessarily an adverse effect on poetic inspiration—there are many examples to the contrary. But was the change, in Wordsworth's case, in any real sense logical or intellectual ? Did it not rather arise from deep psychological wounds which he suffered in circumstances only indirectly connected with the political events which were made the excuse for reaction ? I believe it did.

We must remember that when Wordsworth decided that all he had written before 1797-8 should be deemed *juvenilia*, he was drawing a line at a point within which many poets have produced their best work. In that year he was already twenty-eight, an age which embraces the whole of Keats's work, and most of Shelley's. Moreover, before reaching that age he had undergone all the vital experiences which were to mould his character and determine the course of his life. He had burned with revolutionary zeal ; he had gone to France to participate in the

<sup>1</sup> *Wordsworth*. London (Cape), 1930.

## A Coat of Many Colours

great events which were stirring his imagination ; he had fallen passionately in love and become the father of an illegitimate child ; and then, still within this period, he had lost his revolutionary zeal, retreating first to Godwinian rationalism and then to his own philosophy of natural piety ; and in the process he had renounced his first love, and made of this passionate experience a guilty secret unrevealed to all but a few of his most intimate friends for the rest of his long life. It is one of the strangest transformations in that age of romantic personalities, and the extent to which his poetry can be—or as some would have it, *should* be—interpreted in the light of this experience remains one of the most interesting problems in the history of literature.

The extreme theory which I put forward some years ago seeks to hinge the whole process on what must have been the intensest event—Wordsworth's passion for Annette. The intellectual changes in Wordsworth's mind are regarded as a secondary consequence of the emotional changes, and as largely determined by them. The fundamental process is physical or emotional ; the rest is a superstructure of rationalization or sublimation. This theory has not found much favour with academic critics, least of all with devoted Wordsworthians like Professor de Sélincourt. But I am bound to say that I find nothing but confirmation of it in the definitive edition of Wordsworth's works which Professor de Sélincourt was editing so scrupulously and so objectively up to the time of his death. That confirmation is to be found, not only in passages and poems which the later Wordsworth suppressed, and which are now for the first time published, but in a general reconsideration of the significance of the work done by Wordsworth between his return from France at the end of 1792 and his mystical rebirth in 1797–8. Here there is not space to give all the necessary supporting quotations, but the long poem

## Wordsworth's Remorse

*Guilt and Sorrow*, the strange tragedy *The Borderers*, and several of the shorter poems included among the *Juvenilia* and published for the first time in the definitive edition, are bathed in a morbid atmosphere of guilt and remorse, intense with a feeling which no merely political disillusionment could justify or explain. The following lines from an early version of *Guilt and Sorrow*, probably written in the summer of 1793, provided the keynote :

Unhappy Man ! thy sole delightful hour  
Flies fast ; it is thy miserable dower  
Only to taste of joy that thou mayst pine  
A loss, which rolling suns shall ne'er restore.

From that feeling of inevitable loss he passes to regret for his hasty passion, then to feelings of guilt and remorse, then to attempts at rationalistic justification, and finally to more moral and more sublime feelings of renunciation, resignation and repair. If this process were not clear enough in the text of the poems, it is revealed with complete directness and a power of self-analysis of the highest order in a prefatory essay which Wordsworth wrote for *The Borderers*. This manuscript, which was only recently discovered, was published by Professor de Sélincourt in a volume of miscellaneous essays six years ago, but did not then receive the attention it deserved. Now that it is included in the canon of Wordsworth's works, it should be studied for what it really is ; a key to the very complex transformation which Wordsworth's mind underwent in these formative years. The general moral, says Wordsworth, is " to show the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime " ; but it must be stressed that the final effect of this document, and of the poems we have been considering, is not to involve Wordsworth in a charge of hypocrisy or equivocation. We may regret that he deceived the world and we may believe that



## A Coat of Many Colours

this deceit had a blighting effect on his subsequent development; but we know that at least he was uncommonly honest with himself, and that his mind was of a depth and subtlety rarely exceeded among men of genius.

What is this mental activity we call *remorse*? The word comes from the Latin verb meaning *to bite*, and its literal sense is shown by the medieval English mystic who wrote the *Agenbite of Inwit*—the repeated gnawing of the conscience. It arises from the consciousness of some wrong done in the past, perhaps concealed, certainly never expiated. It is a terrible scourge, and the part it has played in the psychology of great writers has always been disastrous. There are many lives from which this truth could be illustrated—Tolstoy's is one, but none is so clear as Wordsworth's.<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth became so obsessed by this feeling that much of his earlier work, as I have already indicated, deals directly with themes of remorse, as though he were trying to get rid of the burden by objectifying it in a work of art.

In a cancelled scene from *The Borderers*, one of the characters cries :

. . . ah, teach me first,  
If not to bring back all I've loved, at least  
To rescue my poor thoughts, which now and ever  
Bleed helplessly on Memory's piercing thorn.

In the Preface which he wrote to this play, but which he did not publish (it appeared for the first time in the first volume of Professor de Sélincourt's edition of Wordsworth's *Works*), he makes a very acute analysis of his own case :

<sup>1</sup> "Remorse is not among the eternal verities. The Greeks were right to dethrone her. Her action is too capricious, as though the Erinyes selected for punishment only certain men and certain sins. And of all means to regeneration Remorse is surely the most wasteful. It cuts away healthy tissue with the poisoned. It is a knife that probes far deeper than the evil."—E. M. Forster : *Howards End* (1910), p. 316.

## Wordsworth's Remorse

Let us suppose [he says] a young man of great intellectual powers yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence. His master passions are pride and the love of distinction. He has deeply imbibed a spirit of enterprise in a tumultuous age. He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great crime.—That influence on which all his happiness is built immediately deserts him. His talents are robbed of their weight, his exertions are unavailing, and he quits the world in disgust, with strong misanthropic feelings.

In such a case, said Wordsworth, there would be a tendency for the remorseful mind to seek relief from two sources, action and meditation. If he follows the line of action, he will attempt to build up his own power and to give vent to his frustrated feelings in aggressive violence. "Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating." But if—and here Wordsworth is contemplating his own case—he follows the line of meditation, then he will indulge in what it is fashionable nowadays to call "rationalization"—that is to say, in Wordsworth's words, "having indulged a habit, dangerous in a man who has fallen, of dallying with moral calculations, he becomes an empiric, and a daring and unfeeling empiric. He disguises from himself his own malignity by assuming the character of a speculator in morals, and one who has the hardihood to realize his speculation." The main object of Wordsworth's play was to show "the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime."

It is one of the characteristics of remorse that it acts like a slow drug. It calls into existence an antidote to the pain which accompanies it, and when the pain disappears, and the original crime is forgotten, or contemplated with equanimity, it is because the drug has completed its anæsthetic work. Anæsthetic is the right word—it is the feelings that are killed. But the feelings have a unity ;

## A Coat of Many Colours

they can only be dulled by working upon the whole mind or sensibility. The mind that feels remorse is the same mind that feels the beauties of nature or of human affections. The shell of insensibility which it cultivates is over-all : the victim cannot consciously preserve a sensitive area for the benefit of his poetry, or for any other purpose.

It is for this reason that great artists often seem to despise or evade the code of conventional morality. Shelley is a case in point. His desertion of Harriet Westbrook, his first wife, was a crime against the conventional code of morality as serious as Wordsworth's, and it had far more tragic consequences. But Shelley was not a victim of remorse. In a famous retort to Southey, who had charged him with immorality, he said :

You select a single passage out of a life otherwise not only spotless, but spent in an impassioned pursuit of virtue, which looks like a blot, merely because I regulated my domestic arrangements without deferring to the notions of the vulgar, although I might have done so quite as conveniently had I descended to their base thoughts—this you call *guilt*. . . . I am innocent of ill, either done or intended ; the consequences you allude to flowed in no respect from me. . . .

There are other statements in his letters to the same effect. They do not prove that Shelley had a callous heart : there is, in any case, other evidence in overwhelming quantity which shows how sensitive and affectionate he was. They prove, if anything, Shelley's possession of a moral courage of exceptional strength. There are weak people who have no moral code and there are timid people who conform to a conventional moral code ; there are also a few people strong enough to formulate their own moral code, and Shelley was one of these.

But to return to Wordsworth. If we relate his poetic production to the psychological development suggested by the theory I have advanced, we shall find that it divides

## Wordsworth's Remorse

into four very distinct periods. There is first of all the *Juvenilia*, the poems like *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* which were written before his decisive experiences in France. Then come the poems of Remorse, which I have already mentioned and which fill the next five years. Then in 1797 begins his intimate collaboration with Coleridge. This is the supreme phase of his creative activity, and it lasted about ten years. From about 1800 he composed, not merely with difficulty, but as his sister Dorothy relates in her *Journals*, with a real sense of pain and physical exhaustion. He was fighting against frustration and inhibition. Remorse was completing its deadly work. He was to live for another fifty years, his powers at first swiftly, and then slowly but completely giving out. The dying embers emit an occasional spark, but nothing that in any degree adds to the total impression of his genius.

It may be asked at this point why, if remorse was the active agent of Wordsworth's decline, his greatest period comes, not immediately as a consequence of his decisive experiences, but only some five years later ; and why the deadening effects of remorse did not begin to develop until some ten years later. The answer would have to take into account certain rhythms of psychological development (intermittences of the heart, as Marcel Proust called them) of which Wordsworth himself was well aware, and indeed made the basis of his famous theory of poetic composition. We might say, briefly, that from the age of twenty-two to twenty-seven Wordsworth was too near to the events, too inwardly agitated, to compose great poetry ; that between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-two, when he wrote his greatest poetry, he was recollecting his emotions in a state of relative tranquillity, under the immediate personal influence of his sister Dorothy and of Coleridge ; and that up to the date of his marriage to Mary Hutchinson, which

## A Coat of Many Colours

took place in October, 1802, he had not taken the irrevocable step of finally deserting his French mistress and their child. By then the phase of contending motives was over : the heart was passive and remorse could henceforth do its deadly work without the mitigation of hope or irresolution.

### 38. *Realism and Superrealism*

THESE two extremes of art do not exhaust all the possible forms of plastic expression. There is classical art, for example, which is idealistic ; there is naturalistic art and academic art ; impressionist art and abstract art. There are all these types of art, and it is possible to find good art and bad art among them all. Nevertheless, I think the distinction between realism and superrealism represents something fundamental. All art is a kind of language—a language of form and colour, instead of words and sentences. To that extent all art is subjective : it expresses what a particular individual—the painter or sculptor—feels and thinks about a particular subject. But there is a broad distinction between feeling and thinking about an object which we are actually observing with our senses, and feeling and thinking about a subject which only exists in our minds. And that is the fundamental distinction between these two types of art. One type begins with what is immediate and actual in the world—a flower, an animal or a human being ; the other type begins with what is conjured up or imagined in the mind—the image, the phantom, or the dream.

During the nineteenth century—at any rate in this country—there grew up a curious prejudice in favour of a naïve form of realistic art. It was an art, or rather a technique, which we call naturalistic, and we may describe any prejudice in its favour as curious because if you examine the history of art from the earliest times, you will find

## Realism and Surrealism

that this kind of art is extremely rare. It is only at long intervals, and usually in somewhat luxurious and decadent periods, that artists have tried to give in their paintings and sculpture an exact representation of what the eye sees. Now that we have photography—even coloured photography—there is no longer the excuse of recording the appearances of things which was one of the functions of the artist in the past. But in the past that function was always considered a minor one, and the most exact artists, like the Dutch painters of flower-pieces, have never been great artists. Great artists have always had what we rightly regard as a higher aim. They have always desired, not merely to make a record, but to express an idea, even a point of view or judgement, and to do this with the proper materials of their art. Thus the great masters of European art—Giotto, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Rubens, El Greco—such artists do not give you exact pictures of the natural world—they create a world of their own which is an imaginary world, bearing little or no relation to the appearance of nature.

Modern art is essentially an insistence on that freedom of artistic creation. In that sense it is merely a return to well-established traditions.

That is all very well, it might be said, but there are limits. Liberty is not licence: the old masters, however free in their compositions, did at any rate base their art on realistic elements. However imaginative their scenes and subjects, a man is always recognizably a man, a tree a tree and so on. In your modern pictures we never know whether we are looking at a man or a tree. . . .

The truth is that art has no limits. Art is anything that can be imagined, and expressed. But living as we do in particular circumstances and with particular desires and experiences, the art of our time is not so indeterminate. It is something determined by our social and economic

## A Coat of Many Colours

conditions, and by the ideas and habits we inherit from the past.

Those conditions are continually changing. Just as our social and economic conditions change, so do our habits and ideas. We change our houses and our clothes, our food and our morals. We change our art. But just as there are people who cling on to old fashions in houses and clothes, food and customs, so there are people who want to retain old fashions in painting and sculpture. And if we belong to a younger generation we say of such people that they are old-fashioned or prejudiced.

I would like to suggest that the prevalent misunderstanding of modern art is due, not so much to a lack of sensibility, not even to blank ignorance of the aims of the modern artist, but simply to this sort of prejudice. We go about with a certain preconception of what art ought to be like ; it is a narrow conception derived from our environment, from the education we have had, and from the economic limitations imposed on our mode of life. I do not say this in any kind of snobbish spirit. Indced, the most limited people may be those who have enjoyed all the privileges of wealth and rank—who are, so to speak, heirs to a particular tradition. They inherit their culture along with the rest of their heirlooms, and it is they who most strenuously resist change and dispossession.

Surely these people, who inherit their culture and preserve it unchanged, are not the true traditionalists. Tradition is not a heritage ; it is rather an active principle, a principle we apply to solve particular problems ; and since the problems change with every age, so must the solutions. From this point of view, modern art is not fundamentally revolutionary or subversive. It only seems to be revolutionary because it insists on developing the central tradition of art. And it is not only in art that the return to tradition, or the maintenance of a tradition, takes

## Realism and Surrealism

on the outward appearances of a revolution ; we might find plenty of examples in the history of religion and science.

That phrase I have used, " the return to tradition ", indicates another danger. There are many people who revolt against the conventions they have inherited. They dislike the houses they have been brought up in, the pictures and furniture of their parents, and that general air of established righteousness which one generation tries to put across its successor. There are various ways of escape for the younger generation : they can become nihilists—people who do not believe in anything in particular, whose only desire is to uproot and destroy ; or they can build anew. But more likely they will just look round for something they like better. Not acting on any principle of creation or destruction, they will accumulate a new set of possessions from the things of the past. They may even adopt a particular period, like Tudor or Georgian ; or they make merely a miscellaneous collection of bric-a-brac from all periods—and by bric-a-brac I do not mean only furniture, prints and china, but also ideas and attitudes, even a religion. For there are people who choose their mental furniture in the same way that they choose their household furniture.

Such people are apt to consider themselves broad-minded, but actually their attitude is a product, not of reason, but of timidity. It is a " safety first " policy in matters of taste and criticism. It is characteristic of phases of civilization that have lost their belief in any central doctrine or universal faith, particularly of periods when this intellectual scepticism is combined with social irresponsibility, when art, along with other worldly goods, becomes a symbol of wealth and power. Such people, for whom we have the name *dilettanti*, possess neither the courage nor the convictions which would enable them to discover and support those works of art which are being



## A Coat of Many Colours

produced by their contemporaries. Apart from the fact that such works could not be treated as gilt-edged securities, they would demand an individual exercise of perception. The only real taste is a contemporary taste. I do not say that a real taste will confine itself to contemporary works of art—it will in a certain sense be timeless.

I have said that one kind of artist turns away from the outer world of perceptions to the inner world of imagination and dream. That is obvious if we look at the art of any great period. But if we examine the imaginative creations of great painters like Giorgione or Rembrandt or El Greco, we observe that though they may transcend reality to the point of mystery, they do nevertheless preserve a certain rationality. Their themes may be "far fetched", their ideas poetic and even strange, but they use recognizable conventions to express their themes or ideas. That is to say, they use forms and compositions which are part of the intellectual equipment of an educated man of the time. If they want to express the spiritual or poetic world, there is a whole stock-in-trade of gods and goddesses, nymphs and satyrs, legends and myths ready made. But the kind of imaginative art which we call superrealist, has very little in common with such pictorial charades. It has no ready-made stock-in-trade. It has no tradition and no rules. There are precedents for it, but these are mostly found in the art of people who have no rational culture, and who do not judge things by intellectual standards—so-called savage peoples. This fact suggests one possible explanation of superrealism—that since our age is one of increasing savagery, it is only natural that our artists should revert to a savage type of art. But that is not quite the line of my argument. I would rather say that there is a savage in every human being, and always has been ; and that our savage instincts find their sublimation in art. But that too is not an altogether satisfactory argument—it suggests

## Realism and Surrealism

that art is a sort of medicine to make us mentally healthy. That may be one of its functions, but art is something more and something greater. It is the exploration of the heights and depths of the human mind. Just as the physical world is explored by the scientist whose discoveries are then recorded in the laws of nature, so the psychical world is explored by the poet and the painter, and their discoveries are recorded in works of art. This psychical world, this world of our dreams and desires, is just as important, just as much a part of reality, as the world of matter and energy. And in order to make his discoveries in this psychical universe, the artist must conduct experiments. The poems and pictures he offers to us are not to be regarded as complete in themselves ; they are facts won from the unknown—records of experiences which throw some light on the greatest of all mysteries, the human mind.

Therefore accept the fragments of that great mystery in the spirit in which they are offered—humbly, tolerantly, without prejudice. They have something to say to you if only you will look at them with innocent eyes. Picasso is inviting you to a carnival where Pierrot, Harlequin and Columbine hide their tragedy under gay geometric costumes ; Mirò entices you into a playground where the sun is shedding globules of pure colour ; Max Ernst leads you into a nocturnal forest bright with lynx-eyes and the phosphorescent gleam of moths' wings ; Paul Nash takes you on to the open downs and reanimates the standing stones in the Druids' Shrine . . . these painters restore to art the magic and the wonder which it had lost in that dreary waste of commerce, cash-values and common sense which is our immediate fate and shameful past.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 39. *A Further Note on Surrealism*

IN the Introduction to his *Short Survey of Surrealism* David Gascoyne warns us that his treatment of the subject "should not be taken to imply that surrealism is anything but a 'latent state of mind, a human attitude in the widest sense of the word human'. Surrealism is *not* a style, it is *not* a school of literature or painting, it is *not* a system of æsthetics." One might venture, perhaps, to call it a philosophy of life; it is certainly a *Weltanschauung*. "I say that there exists a lyrical element that conditions for one part the psychological and moral structure of human society, that has conditioned it for all time and that will continue to condition it. This lyrical element is up to this day, even though in spite of them, the fact and the sole fact of specialists." Such is Breton's declaration, and the lyrical element he refers to is, of course, the unconscious element which so far has only been treated seriously and systematically by the psychoanalysts. It has always been recognized (at least, by all but the most doctrinaire and academic of critics) that the creative or inventive force in art comes from some obscure depth in the personality, and the more perceptive poets like Goethe and Blake have even suggested that this source is in some way related to the instinctive or sexual faculties, and that it has some connection with our dream life. What has been thus a vague intuition on the part of a few isolated individuals, the surrealists would make a systematic basis for artistic experiment. Just as the old naturalistic school of painting (or of poetry) was based on the careful observation of natural facts, so the new school is based on the careful observation of facts equally "natural" but hitherto neglected—the facts below the surface of normal perception, the facts presented in dream, hypnosis and clairvoyance.

## A Further Note on Surrealism

As defined in the first manifesto of the Surréalistes (1924) surrealism is "pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all æsthetic or moral pre-occupations." It is not merely that surrealism wishes to introduce an element of the dream world into art ; it definitely and defiantly proclaims the superiority of this dream-world ; its images and processes alone are a clue to the true nature of reality and a guide to "the solution of the principal problems of life". It follows that surrealism must be dissociated from all those forms of art which under the guise of fantasy or imagination are merely attempts to avoid reality, to take refuge in an illusion. "The most vital feature of surrealism", says Mr. Gascoyne, "is its exclusive interest in that point at which literature and art give place to real life, that point at which the imagination seeks to express itself in a more concrete form than words or plastic images." For that reason surrealism must be more than a literary or artistic movement ; it must aim at nothing less than a transformation of life itself. Breton ended an address to a Congress of Writers with these words : " '*Transformer le monde,*' a dit Marx ; '*changer la vie,*' a dit Rimbaud ; *ces deux mots d'ordre pour nous n'en font qu'un.*'"

Let me try in a sentence or two to define my own attitude to this general philosophy of art. The time is past when anyone can seriously dispute the relevance of the facts revealed by psychoanalysts ; what we might call the unconscious basis of all forms of art is now an established truth. I believe that the greatest power of art, especially the greatest power of the greatest art—poetry—is derived from the automatic workings of the poet's mind, and that the poet's essential faculties (his sensibility to language and his agility in metaphor-making) are only operative when

## A Coat of Many Colours

the rational faculties are suspended and expression becomes instinctive (intuitive or unconscious). Whatever poetry I myself have written was experienced in that way. I doubt if any values which are specifically poetic or lyrical are ever of any other origin. I am not sure, however, that one can poeticize the whole of life. Whatever value we ascribe to "progress" (and admittedly that value may be questioned) has been achieved by an increasing development of consciousness or objectivity—in other words, of reason and all those "controls" which are opposed to psychic automatism. In that development new types of art have arisen which owe little or nothing to the unconscious mind—which are in effect rational arts depending more and more on the intellect alone, or at least the intellect combined with a purely sensational and hedonistic awareness. These are the so-called classical types of art, though not everything in a classical age necessarily conforms to the type.

It is possible to argue (as the superrealist does) that all such art is false art, dead from its conception. I do not see, however, why both types of art should not be valid. I do not see why both types should not be practised by one and the same artist, though I believe that in general the plastic arts will tend towards rationality and the poetic arts towards superreality; I have no faith in the architecture of the postman Cheval, one of the more mythical figures in the *surréaliste* movement. Prose, at any rate, and especially in the hands of Monsieur Breton, remains a supremely rational art.

A philosophy of life that sets out to transform life inevitably involves a revolutionary aim in the political sphere. The *surréalistes* are revolutionaries, opposed to all the bourgeois ideals of capitalist culture. Ideally they should be communists—they accept the doctrine of dialectical materialism—but they experience some difficulty

## George Saintsbury

in practice. They resent the implication that art should be polemical. "L'imagination artistique doit rester libre. Elle est tenue quitte par définition de toute fidélité aux circonstances, très spécialement aux circonstances *grisantes* de l'histoire. L'œuvre d'art, sous peine de cesser d'être elle-même, doit demeurer déliée de toute espèce de but pratique." That is merely the most relevant of their objections to the communist régime in Russia; they criticize it also on purely political grounds—for its departure from its early idealism, its fraternization with capitalist governments, its gradual admission of and even encouragement of bourgeois morals. In all this the Surréalistes show courage and consistency, and far from being "played out", remain the only consciously critical intellectuals *within* the revolutionary movement.

### 40. George Saintsbury

THERE can scarcely be a critic or student of literature to-day, in this country or in America, who has not benefited liberally from such books as the *History of Criticism*, the *History of English Prosody* and the *History of English Prose Rhythm*. But these works are not in any real sense criticism; nominally they are historical, and even as history they should be further qualified as surveys rather than as investigations. The latter type of history implies a very limited field, and very deep burrowing; Saintsbury skimmed over the surface of received facts, marshalled them and ordered them, in some sense masticated them for less voracious readers. His books will probably be used as manuals by several generations of undergraduates; for official education such as it is, they are perfect instruments. They guide the student down tidy paths, they cram his unwilling maw with the fruit of knowledge, they lead him

## A Coat of Many Colours

inevitably into the wilderness of satiety. They communicate a sense of the author's enormous gusto.

If gusto were a virtue in a critic (instead of being, on the whole, a disadvantage : it usually implies a lack of discrimination), Saintsbury's numerous prefaces and essays would be good criticism. There is no doubt that Saintsbury enjoyed the books he wrote about, and enjoyed writing about them. But enjoyment is only of value to the critic if he can be sure that he has good grounds for enjoyment, if his enjoyment invariably leads him to the best ; if, in short, enjoyment is related to a hierarchy of values which can be defined. In writing of Pater, Saintsbury comes very near to expressing his own ideal :

The more your interests are, the better ; the higher, the nobler, the purer the subjects of them are, of course, the better ; but the main thing is to get *themselves* intensified, purified, ennobled ; to clear the mind in regard to them of convention and of cant ; to clear it of confusion and commonplace, to make the flame "gem-like", the essence quintessential, the gold free from alloy.

This reads a little like the psychopathic panacea of a few years ago : "every day and in every way I get better and better" : it is a *bombinans in vacuo*, a fussy ball of intensity bouncing off into vacancy, no one knows where or whence, nor cares.

In a very interesting memoir of Saintsbury written by Professor Blyth Webster, one or two personal characteristics of Saintsbury's are mentioned which offer some clue to his deficiencies as a critic. He is coupled with his friend Creighton, and we are told :

In mundane matters their turn of mind was apt to be sceptical. It was free from trace of bigotry, distrusted generalizations and specifics, did not divide parties or persons into black or white, and felt the irony of things. Each had the historic and comparative sense, and would not dogmatize in mere terms of the present. Not

## George Saintsbury

unacquainted with the higher criticism in their fields of study, they were unimpressed with its methods and results ; and, indifferent to metaphysical and psychological subtlety, they were chargeable with cleaving to the outer husk of fact.

And of Saintsbury alone : " If he does not keep altogether out of controversy, he engages in no logomachies ; he declines to define, and will not prescribe nor condemn." These observations are offered in praise of Saintsbury, and his biographer is at least complacent when he says that " it was later a principle of his, ' most sincere and most strong ', and his practice, not to criticize living authors ". Actually this attitude, common in academic circles, reveals a certain fear of life, a certain treatment of literature as a refuge from life, which is actually the explanation of Saintsbury's limitations. He was, in fact, a typical exponent of the Victorian evasiveness. There is one characteristic common to all the authors he preferred and recommended—they are all men without general ideas. He instinctively avoided those writers who probe deeply into the problems of human life. That his attitude may have sprung from a conviction that those problems are beyond the capacities of the individual, and are best left to the authority of institutions, is true enough ; but that does not exempt him from the charge of timidity. Critics like Dryden and Coleridge before him, and like Mr. Eliot in our own time, have held a similar conviction. But holding that conviction, they have not been afraid—have, indeed, regarded it as an essential duty—to relate their criticism to their beliefs. One has only to compare, for example, Saintsbury's essay on Pater with Eliot's essay on Pater and Arnold to see the difference between the literary gossip of a refugee from life and the criticism of a man for whom literature is an integral part of life, dealing with problems which cannot with any good conscience be



## A Coat of Many Colours

isolated from life. Perhaps in this particular case it is too much to expect Saintsbury to criticize Pater on the same grounds as Eliot ; for at bottom Saintsbury's and Pater's attitude is the same attitude—the divorce of literature and art from everything that makes it significant.

There is, of course, a sense in which literature does and must preserve its independence ; the poet's first concern is the technical quality of his verse, and a poet who subordinates this concern to questions of religion, morality or ideology of any kind is thereby the less a poet. The "values" which a poet imports into his work are his fatality ; they are inevitable but accidental to his sensibility. They cannot be forced or cultivated in any way. It is precisely the function of criticism to be aware of the imponderable and the unpredictable in a poet's work ; and to have sufficient grasp of general values to find a place in their hierarchy for the object of his criticism. Logomachies and definitions, generalizations and specifics—these are ugly words for necessary activities, and in rejecting them Saintsbury was avoiding the essential function of the critic.

### 41. *Max Liebermann*

MAX LIEBERMANN was one of the grand old men of European art. Born only eight years after Cézanne, seven years after Monet, and ten years before Seurat, he was, when he died at the age of eighty-seven, still painting pictures in a vigorous impressionist style. Post-impressionism and its aftermath had left him undisturbed ; he was an authentic survivor from the epoch of Manet and Degas, and as such he deserved our respect, and a fair measure of admiration. In his own country he has earned the highest honours : in 1920 he received the order "Pour le Mérite"—the highest of all German decorations ; in 1924 he became

## Max Liebermann

President of the Academy ; in 1927 the freedom of the City of Berlin was conferred on him ; in 1928 he was appointed Chancellor of " Pour le Merite ". In 1933 he renounced all his honours. For this painter, the most honoured of all contemporary German painters, a painter essentially German in his outlook, had the misfortune to be born a Jew.

He began his career in 1866 as a pupil of Karl Steffeck, a popular painter of horses, and then came under the influence of Munkacsy, a *genre* painter who had a great vogue in the nineteenth century (" The Last Hour of the Condemned ", etc.). In 1873 Liebermann went to Paris, and during his five years there became acquainted not only with the work of the Barbizon school, but also with Courbet and Millet. But the strongest influence on him at this time was not French, but Dutch. He visited Holland from Paris, and from then onwards returned to it year after year. There he found an art very much to his liking—the intimate realistic art of painters like Josef Israels and Antonis Mauve. After a few years in Munich, a place he did not find very sympathetic, Liebermann went to Berlin, where he established himself in 1884 and where he remained for the rest of his life. Here he could not escape that eupeptic Prussian, Adolf Menzel. Menzel's work has to be seen to be believed. He had the infinite-capacity-for-taking-pains theory of genius (" Genie ist Fleiss ") and for the best part of the nineteenth century (he lived to be ninety) he took pains to portray all the formless energy, the tasteless life, and the topicality of that monstrous age. He had the capacity for the task ; he was the professional painter *in excelsis*. He infected Liebermann with his worldliness, his lustiness, his technical virtuosity. Liebermann never descended to such detail as Menzel, and though Menzel could be impressionistic, he was never an Impressionist in the historical sense of the word. But that is a label we can fairly apply to Liebermann.

## A Coat of Many Colours

As compared with a French Impressionist like Degas (his nearest parallel in France) Liebermann seems very heavy-handed and insensitive. His "Polo Players", for example, should be compared with one of Degas's racecourse pictures. Liebermann perhaps renders energy and action more directly; Degas's canvases are comparatively static. But in every other quality, in ingenuity of composition, in atmosphere, above all in colouring, the French painter is infinitely more subtle and successful. Liebermann's landscapes owe more to Manet. Though one does not think of Manet as one of the great colourists, he has at least his liveliness. Liebermann would seem to be completely devoid of this sensibility. His paintings are not positively disharmonious; they are just dull. He did, in the course of his development, greatly lighten their tone, but only to expose more and more his essential reliance on line.

Liebermann was too old and too generally respected to suffer the fate of nearly all Jewish artists in Germany. But in view of the Nazi theory of racial qualities in art, and of the detrimental effect of Jewish elements in a national culture, it is worth while to consider what characteristics in Liebermann's art might be due to his Jewish origin. I confess I find none at all. The Jewish genius is not naturally expressed in the plastic arts; there is no Hebrew architecture or painting or sculpture to correspond to Hebrew literature. Nevertheless, in the case of one or two modern artists (Marc Chagall, for example) one might isolate a certain quality which is Jewish—a certain rhetoric, a certain psychological fantasy. But these qualities are not present in Liebermann. "The more naturalistic a painter is, the more imaginative he must be; for the imagination of a painter is shown not in the representation of ideas but in the representation of reality." That is a saying of Liebermann's, and it certainly expresses a sentiment inconsistent with the general character of German

## Max Liebermann

art, in which there has always been a mystical, transcendental tendency. But the contrary tendency expressed by Liebermann is not typically Jewish ; it is merely anti-transcendental, anti-romantic. It exactly describes the art of such un-Jewish artists as Constable and Cézanne.

I have often been upbraided for my habit of rash generalization. I prefer to generalize, because it seems to me to be the only vital kind of mental activity, even when it is wide of the mark. But here is a case where generalization does not seem to me to be possible. Perhaps at certain stages in its development a people expresses its national or racial characteristics in its art ; but that is not true for the whole of history, and particularly untrue of the modern period, since the Renaissance. Again and again we have seen movements in art arise which, in virtue of a certain universality in their basic assumptions, sweep across boundaries and racial divisions, and unite men in the commonalty of an idea. Such movements are not national, and yet they are not anti-national ; they are supernational, and those forces which oppose them are the forces of philistinism—of intellectual mediocrity and cultural reaction.

### 42. *Art and Ethics*

THE ethical aspect of art was one of the preoccupations of nineteenth-century writers, and from Ruskin to Tolstoy they all made a desperate effort to give art an ethical foundation. But, however variously they expressed themselves, they had only one notion of how this could be done. Art itself must be ethical—that is to say, the artist must have an ethical conception of life and must give clear expression to it in his works. "It is necessary that he should stand on the level of the highest life-conception of his time," said Tolstoy ; and Ruskin was even more

## A Coat of Many Colours

explicit. But art remained obstinately non-ethical ; indeed, these doctrines only succeeded in provoking a reaction among artists, and art has never been so deliberately devoid of a message as during these last fifty years. At the same time, and in the true sense of the word, we can also assert that art has never been so effectively ethical. Never has art roused such intense feelings, of protest or of partisanship ; even in this indifferent country of ours works of art have been reviled and defaced by indignant zealots ; while farther afield the smoke still rises from holocausts of condemned pictures and books. To a great extent, indeed, the artist now occupies the place of the persecuted saint of another day.

The explanation of this paradox is simple ; for art actually becomes more ethical the purer it becomes. Ultimately art is concerned with one value and one value only : truth. But truth is an ethical value—perhaps the supreme ethical value. Modern art is unpopular because it has pursued this value to the exclusion of all sentiment and compromise. In painting, for example, it has discarded the shadow for the substance, the appearance for the form ; in poetry it has rejected artifice and convention in favour of the rhythms of human speech ; in fiction it has laid bare the psychological motives which determine our actions ; and generally art has discovered that the imagination is an instrument of revelation, not an agent of obscurity. In modern art the public discovers an unfamiliar world ; and many people draw back, frightened or resentful. But the new images, the new vision, cannot be dismissed ; they are so much more vivid than the old ways of seeing and hearing ; they are so much more real. So gradually the public accepts them ; it recognizes them as a necessary revelation. Art has thus achieved its ethical object, which is to persuade us to accept a true vision of the world.

## Art and Ethics

So long as the public and the artist moved within the conventions of a generally accepted moral code, art was like a game of chess. Each element had a definite function, and the art was in the skill with which the accepted rules were applied. Art then encouraged qualities like ingenuity, memory, and style. Even so, artists were always the people who broke the rules ; who invented new pieces, new moves, new games. Artists cannot escape the accusation of being disturbers of the peace, outragers of morality, and generally *advocati diaboli*. But the well-being of society demands some such ferment. Stability, which we foolishly yearn for, is but another name for stagnation ; and stagnation is death. The ideal condition of society is the same as the ideal condition of any living body—a state of dynamic tension. The yearning for safety and stability must be balanced by impulses towards adventure and variety. Only in that way can society be stirred into the vibrations and emanations of organic growth.

Plato, as is too often and too complacently recalled, banished the poet from his Republic. But that Republic was a deceptive model of perfection. It might be realized by some dictator, but it could only function as a machine functions—mechanically. And machines function mechanically only because they are made of dead inorganic materials. If you want to express the difference between an organic progressive society and a static totalitarian régime, you can do so in one word : this word *art*. Only on condition that the artist is allowed to function freely can society embody those ideals of liberty and intellectual development which to most of us seem the only worthy sanctions of life.

# A Coat of Many Colours

## 43. *The later Yeats*

THERE is no doubt that Yeats was influenced, and influenced for the good, by the technique of some of his juniors, notably by Ezra Pound.

The change can best be examined in an early poem which Yeats actually rewrote in his later manner. "The Sorrow of Love" was originally published in 1893; as late as the 1912 edition of the *Poems* and perhaps later, it read as follows :

The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,  
The full round moon and the star-laden sky,  
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves,  
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

And then you came with those red mournful lips,  
And with you came the whole of the world's tears  
And all the trouble of her labouring ships,  
And all the trouble of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,  
The curd-pale moon, the white stars in the sky,  
And the loud chaunting of the unquiet leaves,  
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry.

In the 1933 edition of the *Collected Poems* this poem has been rewritten and reads as follows :

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves  
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers ;

## The Later Yeats

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

The change, it will be seen, is very drastic, but is it altogether a change for the good? It is, let us observe, in the first place, a change of diction and not of structure; and that is true of all the changes that occurred in Yeats's verse. "All the revisions I have made," Yeats once said to me, "have been in the direction of making my poems less poetic." His aim, therefore, has been very much the same as Wordsworth's—to get rid of "the inane and gaudy phraseology" of an outworn poetic tradition. The suggestion I wish to put forward is that diction and structure are so closely related in the generation of a poem, that you cannot fundamentally change the one without changing the other. But before elaborating that suggestion, let us look at the actual changes which Yeats made in the poem quoted.

*Line 1.*—"Brawling" is substituted for "quarrel". In itself I do not think the word is any improvement, but the change is necessitated by a change in line 2; "quarrel" would not go well with "brilliant", whereas "brawling" provides a good alliterative and assonantal match. "Sparrows" becomes singular—a gain in precision.

*Line 2.*—"full round" was perhaps felt to be a commonplace epithet, but is "brilliant" any better? It is rather vaguer. But this change is perhaps in its turn dictated by the change from "star-laden" to "milky". "Star-laden" is a very early-yeatsian, Celtic twilight epithet of just the kind the poet presumably wanted to get rid of; and since a brilliant moon will cancel out the stars, "milky" becomes a more expressive (incidentally a metaphorical) epithet.

*Line 3.*—"ever-singing" was probably felt to be a



## A Coat of Many Colours

*cliché*, and "loud" is not very exact for the sound of leaves. But "famous harmony" seems to me to be a vaguer and weaker substitute; it is a dead phrase, without any inherent poetic tone. In fact, it is prose.

*Line 4.*—A completely new image is substituted. "Earth's old and weary cry" was probably felt to be a false and indefinite metaphor. "Blotted" is a gain in sound value, and links alliteratively with "brawling" and "brilliant"; it has an onomatopœic value, and provides a much-needed acceleration of the rhythm.

*Line 5.*—A definite image of "a girl" is substituted for the vague "you"; "arose" gives alliteration with "red".

*Line 6.*—"the whole of the world's tears" was perhaps felt to be rather a ridiculous image; the new image is more precise, but still difficult to visualize.

*Lines 7 and 8.*—A completely new image is substituted. The repetition of "And all the trouble of her" was probably felt to be banal, and "myriad years" to be a *cliché*. The introduction of well-known classical allusions is a gain in precision and in the emotional surplus attaching to legendary names.

*Line 9.*—The refrain motive of the sparrows in the eaves is dropped—it is a romantic device, and two such devices in one quatrain were felt to be a little too much. The introduction of a time element, "on the instant", adds dramatic force to the poem. "Clamorous" is a good sonorous word, if a little too emphatic for the noise made by a single sparrow; but it provides alliteration with "climbing", "lamentation", "leaves", "could", "compose" and "cry".

*Line 10.*—The fresh and effective "curd-pale" had to be dropped, since the moon had become brilliant in the first verse; for the same reason the white stars had to be excluded. "Climbing", though it sounds well enough, is rather commonplace, and "empty" is banal.

## The Later Yeats

*Line 11.*—"Loud" must be dropped to agree with the first verse; "chaunting" is an artificial metaphor. The new line has a forceful alliterative movement. But I doubt if a "modern" poet would use a word like "lamentation" in connection with "leaves"; it is almost a *cliché*.

*Line 12.*—The changes are largely dictated by the new form of line 4, and by the desire for alliteration. But "compose" involves a process difficult to visualize, and the line as a whole does not bring the poem to such a definite and inevitable conclusion as in the first version.

These are analytical notes, and perhaps on a reckoning the plus and minus of it all cancels out. It is necessary, in the end, to compare the synthetic feeling of the two versions, and here one can only state a personal reaction. My own is definitely in favour of the earlier version. In spite of the romantic diction against which Yeats rightly reacted, I feel that it produces a unity of effect which, romantic as it is, is superior in force to the more definite, more classical diction of the later version. For the truth is, that the poem in essence and inception is irradically romantic, and had better retain its romantic diction and imagery. As it is, the new version has a patchy effect. The old suit may have been shabby, but it was of a good cut and an even tone; the patches of new classical cloth are too obvious and too disjointed.

This image, with a little stretching, will serve for my objection to Yeats's later verse (but naturally it is only an objection on the highest plane of technical criticism—the kind of criticism that poets exchange between themselves, and which is not meant for laymen). Though he makes his poems out of the latest suitings, all of good classical (or, which comes to the same thing) modernist cloth, the cut is still romantic.

## A Coat of Many Colours

I dreamed as in my bed I lay,  
All night's fathomless wisdom come,  
That I had shorn my locks away  
And laid them on Love's lettered tomb :  
But something bore them out of sight  
In a great tumult of the air,  
And after nailed upon the night  
Berenice's burning hair.

The gesture here, in spite of its precision, is still romantic ; and such poems stand out, luxuriant in the pruned orchard of the later verse. The pruning has produced a larger fruit, a clearer thought ; but the effect is rather bleak, the prose of scientific culture rather than the poetry of natural growth. A complete change of spirit requires a change of form ; of structure as well as of diction. And though one or two poems, such as " Byzantium ", seem to promise the necessary development, Yeats remained to the end faithful to the spirit of another age.

### 44. *Socialist Realism*

IF we are socialists, there are two possible attitudes to adopt towards Marxist critics like Radek and Bukharin : we can excuse them on the grounds that their particular theories, though bearing little relation to the realities of art, are justified by the immediate political necessities—on the grounds, that is to say, that in the bitterest hour of the struggle the artist no less than the worker must be conscripted in the socialist army. But that would be a temporizing argument, for actually both Radek and Bukharin addressed themselves, not to opportunist arguments of this kind, but to general principles. We are entitled to ask, then, how far their theories correspond, not only with the general principles of art, but with the general principles of socialism—more particularly, the general principles of

## Socialist Realism

Marxist socialism. And we can identify these two sets of principles, for if the Marxist dialectic is correct, it must naturally include within its scope the phenomena of art no less than all the other phenomena of human society.

In the end we shall find that neither Marx nor Engels ever committed themselves to such statements as that "realism means making a selection of phenomena from the point of view of what is essential"—that is to say, from the point of view of socialism. Instead we find Engels, for example, writing that "the more the (political) opinions of a writer remain hidden, the better for the work of art". Realism, he goes on to say, illustrating his point with the case of Balzac, "may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions". He admits that many of the world's greatest writers—Æschylus and Aristophanes, Dante and Cervantes, not to mention more recent names like Tolstoy, have produced tendentious works. "But I think (he says) that tendency should arise out of the situation and action, without being specially emphasized, and that an author is not obliged to give the reader a ready-made historical future solution of the social conflicts he depicts."

In his literary judgements, Marx himself was exempt from every kind of political or social prejudice. His favourite authors were Shakespeare and Walter Scott. "He considered Æschylus and Shakespeare (writes his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue) as the two greatest dramatic geniuses of all time. He had devoted to Shakespeare, for whom he had a limitless admiration, profound study. . . . All the Marx family practised a sort of cult for the great English dramatist; his three daughters knew him by heart." Marx was a great reader of novels.

He liked above all those of the eighteenth century, and especially Fielding's *Tom Jones*. The modern authors who tempted him most were Paul de Kock, Charles Lever, Alexandre Dumas and Walter Scott.

## A Coat of Many Colours

He considered *Old Mortality* . . . a masterly work. He liked amusing stories and tales of adventure. His favourite novelists were Cervantes and Balzac. . . . He had such an admiration for Balzac that he proposed to write a critical work of *Le Comédie humaine* when he had finished his economic work.

For Balzac, who far from selecting phenomena from the point of view of guiding principles, carefully ignored his guiding principles, which were those of monarchism, catholicism and reaction.

Remember that Marx's first literary works were poetic, and that all his life he gave free rein to his magnificent imagination. Only the scientist who had this poetic strain in him could conceive a work of the vast scope and comprehensive unity of *Das Kapital*. Is it likely, then, that such a genius would so misconceive art as to limit it to any particular theory of realism, or even to realism as such.

Let us avoid a superstitious reverence for every theory that bears the stamp "made in Russia". Russian critics have no monopoly of Marxism. In our own country there are better Marxist critics than Radek and Bukharin. Ralph Fox is one example. His posthumous essay on *The Novel and the People* is so wise and sensible, so understanding and so fully conscious of the realities of art no less than of socialism, that we cannot too much regret his brave death on the Spanish front. I find very little to criticize in the views he puts forward in his book. He realizes that "the one concern of the novelist is, or should be, this question of the individual will in its conflict with other wills on the battleground of life"—nothing more, nothing less. Marxism, he says, does not deny the individual. "It does not see only masses in the grip of inexorable economic forces. . . . Marxism places man in the centre of its philosophy, for while it claims that material forces may change man,

## Socialist Realism

it declares most emphatically that it is man who changes the material forces and that in the course of so doing he changes himself." It is in this sense that Shakespeare's characters are so ideal, presenting man as being at one and the same time a type and an individual, a representative of the mass and a single personality. Ralph Fox even went so far as to say—and those who know Marxist criticism will realize how rare an admission it is—that "it is completely foreign to the spirit of Marxism to neglect the formal side of art. To Marx form and content were inextricably connected, inter-related by the dialectic of life, and for the novelist of socialist realism formal questions are of first importance."

My only criticism of Ralph Fox is directed towards his use of this word "realism". He says very finely that

the revolutionary task of literature to-day is to restore its great tradition, to break the bonds of subjectivism and narrow specialization, to bring the creative writer face to face with his only important task, that of winning the knowledge of truth, of reality. Art is one of the means by which man grapples with and assimilates reality.

That is finely and truly expressed, but what I would like to ask is whether the only means of grappling with reality is the literary method known as realism? That, to me, does not necessarily follow.

We have two terms, often contrasted, realism and romanticism. We also have the term naturalism and we have something which we call eclecticism. Most of the literature and painting which goes under the name of realism is actually naturalism, and most of the literature and painting known as socialist realism is actually socialist naturalism. In the same way much that is rejected as romanticism—Chateaubriand, for example, or even Scott—is eclecticism: an arbitrary selection of bright and exotic odds and ends on the basis of the individual writer's

## A Coat of Many Colours

idiosyncrasies. Naturalism is accepting the external world in its totality; eclecticism is accepting nothing but what pleases the fancy. Both are false attitudes—both are attitudes without a guiding principle. As for true realism and true romanticism—what is the difference. Was Shakespeare a realist or a romantic? Was Cervantes or Balzac a realist or a romantic? The question, directed to geniuses of this scope, is senseless. The greatest art includes both realism and romanticism, both the senses and the imagination. The greatest art is precisely this: a dialectical process which reconciles the contradictions derived from our senses on the one hand and our imagination on the other. Ralph Fox quoted Keats in his book:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.  
Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,  
Majesties; sovran voices, agonies,  
Creations and destroyings, all at once  
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,  
And deify me, as if some blithe wine  
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,  
And so become immortal.

But that is not a description of a socialist-realist. It is a description of the great humanist artist—of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Balzac, Keats himself—who in his art surveys all and transcends all.

I will now discuss the point of view of another English Marxist—Alick West. In a book called *Crisis and Criticism*, he attacked the positions taken up by T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and myself. Since I agree in the main with his criticisms of Eliot and Richards, who are neither of them socialists, I am all the more anxious to remove the differences which exist between Mr. West and myself, for we are both socialists.

Mr. West's main charge against me leads us directly to the heart of the problem. He says, quite truly, that I do

## Socialist Realism

not relate literature to the tensions of the movement of society, but to tensions within the writer as an isolated unit ; and he then goes on to assert that " the exaltation, direct or indirect, of personality, in isolation from society, means at least an unconscious attachment to capitalist society, within which alone such a conception of personality is possible ". I do not follow the logic of this last assertion, for it was quite possible to isolate and exalt the personality in the age of Montaigne and Shakespeare, and would be in, say, an anarchist community of the future. But actually, of course, I have never for a moment assumed this isolation of the personality. I have seen the individual as in dialectical opposition to society, but that is a very different matter. I have relied, as Mr. West is only too ready to point out, on Freud's interpretation of the personality ; but surely the whole object of psychoanalysis is to show how the personality is formed by reaction to its social environment. Admittedly it does not conceive that environment in exclusively economic terms, but who does but the most purblind and mistaken of Marxian disciples. Environment is not only a matter of money, food and work, but equally of flesh and blood, of emotional and personal relationships. The artist and poet, no less than the normal man, is determined by these same factors, and the only sense in which the artist is isolated is the sense in which we are all isolated by our individual peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. But the artist is the man who can put a price on his peculiarities ; which, extending the sense of the artist to cover all degrees of skill, is true of us all, even under a communist régime.

In a book which was published some time before Mr. West's I made it clear that I did not regard the artist as merely an individualist in conflict with society. Admittedly the mental personality of the artist may be determined by a failure in social adaptation. But his whole effort, I then said, is directed towards a reconciliation with



## A Coat of Many Colours

society, and what he offers to society is not so much a bagful of his own tricks, his idiosyncrasies, but rather some knowledge of the secrets to which he has had access, the secrets of the self which are buried in every man alike, but which only the sensibility of the artist can reveal to us in all their actuality. This "self" is not the personal possession we imagine it to be ; it is largely made up of elements from the unconscious, and the more we learn about the unconscious, the more collective it appears to be. In this sense Marx and Freud work to the same end, the one showing the collective basis of our social and political ideals, the other the collective basis of our personal habits and thoughts.

Mr. West as good as admits this. He admits that my doctrine of personality, based on Freud, is a wider reality than individuality in the old sense, both because of its more direct contact with the unconscious and its power of losing the sense of "I" through identification with other people. But there is a snag in it somewhere. If my doctrine of the free personality—it is not my doctrine so much as it is Keats's—if this doctrine of "negative capability", as Keats called it, is good in so far as it rids the individuality of the poet of the repressive habits which are easily recognizable in the form of capitalist morality, capitalist snobbery, capitalist philosophy and so on, it might be equally good to excuse the poet from an excessive devotion to the dogmas of communism. If, as I maintain in general, the poet and the artist is a creature of intuitions and sympathies and by his very nature shrinks from definiteness and doctrinaire attitudes, then he is exempt from marxist no less than from bourgeois disciplines. As I have said on another occasion :

Pledged to the shifting process of reality, he cannot subscribe to the static provisions of a policy. He has two principal duties : to mirror the world as it is and

## Socialist Realism

to imagine the world as it might be. In Shelley's sense he is a legislator, but the House of Poets is even more incapacitated than the House of Peers. Disfranchised by his lack of residence in any fixed constituency, wandering faithlessly in the no-man's-land of his imagination, the poet cannot, without renouncing his essential function, come to rest in the bleak conventicles of a political party. It is not his pride that keeps him outside ; it is really his humility, his devotion to the complex wholeness of humanity.

It is in this sense that Homer and Æschylus, Shakespeare and Balzac were poets. The poet must reflect the trend of socialism, says Radek ; he must focus attention on the struggle of the proletariat, says Bukharin ; Marxism must be the writer's way of perceiving and knowing the real world, says Ralph Fox ; criticism must value literature in relation to the social movement, says Alick West. Do any of those statements fit Homer and Æschylus, Shakespeare and Balzac ? Can any of these great poets in any degree be said to have reflected a social or political doctrine ? Not one—and least of all Balzac. If Balzac had followed the advice of our pseudo-Marxist critics, he would have made his works subservient to his political theories, which were the reactionary theories of monarchism and catholicism. But Balzac was too great an artist to commit any such mistake. He knew that humanity was a complex whole, and that it was his duty to reflect that wholeness and that complexity without bias of any kind, least of all the bias of his own intellectual concepts. Balzac the novelist was greater than Balzac the politician ; and instinctively he knew it. And so did Marx, who never in any of his writings suggests any other point of view.

The basis of the poet's activity is sympathy—an intuitive understanding of and projection of himself into the object of his contemplation. Intellectual attitudes, moral prejudice, political judgements—all alike destroy the operation

## A Coat of Many Colours

of these universal sympathetic faculties. I believe no statement I have ever made has done me more harm than a note I added to one of my poems—*The End of War*: “It is not my business as a poet to condemn war. . . . Judgement may follow, but should never precede or become embroiled with the act of poetry.” In spite of the anger it has aroused, I still stick to that statement. No one can hate war more strongly than I do, and my hatred of war springs from the experience of it. And on other occasions, which were not poetic, I have expressed that hatred in no uncertain terms. But further: no one could be more convinced of the vileness of capitalism nor be more expectant of the blessings of socialism than I am; on the plane of economic fact and political strife I yield to no man in my devotion to that cause. But in that strife nothing will blind me to the universal aspects of poetry and humanity. I know that when socialism is established among all nations, poetry will still be the poetry of Homer and Shakespeare: the inspired expression of one man’s sympathy for his fellow men.

I am prepared to make one further admission. Mr. West has perceived—and actually I have never made any disguise of the fact—that my ultimate attitudes in poetry and criticism are based on an absolute for which I have only the warrant of individual intuition. For that reason he accuses me of “latent religious thinking”. But for me there is a considerable difference between the recognition of “absolutes” in philosophy and what is generally meant by “religious thinking”. Religious thinking always involves an act of faith—a belief in supernatural revelation. That kind of belief I do not profess. I am essentially a materialist. But as a materialist I find myself involved with certain intangible and imponderable elements which we call emotion and instinct, and to those elements I, as a materialist, must give due attention. I cannot construct

## Socialist Realism

a credible world without making provision for their active play and satisfaction. In the end I find that emotion and instinct must be reconciled with their dialectical opposites, reason and understanding, and that the achievement of such a reconciliation takes the form of an intuition of absolute values. I am not mystical about these absolute values : I submit them to the pragmatic and empirical tests to which I submit all hypotheses and beliefs. They are only absolute in so far as they are consonant with the world of facts, but our knowledge of this world is very limited, and we are therefore thrown back on our intuitions.

But I go further than admitting the presence of such metaphysical elements in my own way of thinking. I ask all those who are socialists to examine the foundations of their own political attitude. I ask them to examine the foundations of Marxism itself. What throughout his cruel and laborious life gave Marx the hope and energy to persist in his great task ? Was he moved by a cold scientific logic, a remote and disinterested rationalism ? We know that such a supposition is absurd. Marx, like every great socialist, was moved by a deep emotional sympathy for the working classes and by a deep anger and indignation at their unjust lot. Their *unjust* lot—what can our use of that phrase mean but that Marx too had this sense of justice, this intuition of an absolute. Let us but ask what we mean by the word “justice”. It is not something we can measure by an economic scale ; it is not even egalitarianism. It is a sense of values, of human values, and our only clue to those values is our intuition of an absolute and metaphysical quality—justice. And finally all our other knowledge and judgement is referred back to such absolutes—absolutes of truth and beauty no less than of justice. It is on these absolutes that our final vision of a classless society must rest, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 45. *The Significance of William James*

IT is possible that the name of William James has become a little remote between the Wars, so that it is surprising to be reminded that his *Pragmatism* was first published as recently as 1907, and that he did not die until 1910. William James was born into the dim and distant world of New England transcendentalism, but his best work belongs to the first decade of this century. And if his name tends to be forgotten, it is perhaps for the best of reasons—for what he himself would have regarded as the best of possible reasons—namely, that his philosophy has become a part of life, an active and progressive force in the politics and culture of our time.

In an interview which he gave to the Press in 1926 Mussolini named James, along with Nietzsche and Sorel, as his philosophical masters. "The pragmatism of William James", he said, "was of great use to me in my political career. James taught me that an action should be judged rather by its results than by its doctrinary basis. I learnt of James that faith in action, that ardent will to live and fight, to which fascism owes a great part of its success." Improbable as this may seem, it has a basis in historical facts. Among the many friends and correspondents James had in all parts of the world we find Giovanni Papini, who, as early as 1906, had become the exponent and apostle of pragmatism in Italy, and among the contributors to Papini's review *Leonardo* we find Benito Mussolini. As it developed fascism certainly relied more on Sorel and Pareto than on William James, and it is possible that whatever Mussolini derived from pragmatism was based on a complete misunderstanding of its meaning; for, as Bergson once pointed out, pragmatism is one of the most subtle doctrines ever known to philosophy. It is even

## The Significance of William James

possible that Lenin's very emphatic rejection of pragmatism was based on a similar misunderstanding, for in some of its essential features pragmatism has affinities with Marxism.

Pragmatism consists of two main principles, and the perversions of it generally emphasize one to the neglect of the other. The first, to adopt Professor Perry's very clear summary, is the pragmatic method, and "proposes to interpret concepts in terms of their consequences for experience or practice"<sup>1</sup>—which is very near to Marx's thesis that a belief is proved to be true or false if it works in practice. The second principle of pragmatism is a theory of truth. Truth is an attribute of ideas rather than of reality, and attaches to ideas in proportion as these prove useful for the purpose for which they were invoked. Or, to quote James's own words :

The truth of a thing or idea is its meaning, or its destiny, that which grows out of it. This would be a doctrine reversing the opinion of the empiricists that the meaning of an idea is that which it has grown from. . . . Unless we find a way of conciliating the notions of truth and change, we must admit that there is no truth anywhere. But the conciliation is made by everyone who reads history and admits that an earlier set of ideas . . . were in the line of development of the ideas in the light of which we now reject them. . . . In so far as they induced these they were true ; just as these will induce others and themselves be shelved. Their truth lay in their function of continuing thought in a certain *direction*.

In short, James's disposition was all the time to regard truth as prospective rather than retrospective. As Bergson was later to emphasize, the origin and inspiration of pragmatism is to be found in the notion of a reality in which man *participates*, and participates above all by means of his intuitive faculties. It was perhaps this reliance on intuition,

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Barton Perry : *The Thought and Character of William James*. 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, n.d. [1935]).

## A Coat of Many Colours

backed as it was by the scientific equipment of a man who had written the *Principles of Psychology*, which more than anything else scandalized his academic colleagues, and which now makes the marxists so suspicious of his philosophy. For once you admit evidence of that kind, you have to take seriously, as James did, the evidence of mystics and even of madmen. James was temperamentally too curious, too vital, to be satisfied with logical or abstract categories. He was, above all, an anti-intellectualist. He claimed, with good reason, that he had destroyed the basis of rationalism and reduced philosophy to a dependency on—even to an identity with—psychology.

It is precisely this tendency which, at the present stage of cultural development, makes him of such interest outside academic circles. All his life James lived and worked in such circles, but he scoffed at them, often in no uncertain terms. "I am *a*-logical, if not illogical," he wrote to one of his correspondents, "and glad to be so when I find Bertie Russell trying to excogitate what true knowledge means, in the absence of any concrete universe surrounding the knower and the known. Ass!" He persisted in addressing himself to the general public, and his books are, as a result, more readable than almost any philosophy ever written, and models of simple expository style. "Active tension" was his ideal and uncertainty, unpredictability, extemporized adaptation, risk, change, anarchy, unpretentiousness, naturalness, the qualities which, according to Professor Perry, he found most palatable. In a word, he was a romantic, and my own interest in his philosophy, for example, is due to the fact that I find in it a premonition of our present romantic revival and a justification of what might be called the poetic attitude. James himself was not a poet, but his temperament might be described by the much-abused word "artistic" (his brother Henry obviously found him too bohemian for his taste). His

## The Significance of William James

interest in abnormal states of mind, hallucination, etc., has, with pragmatic justice, developed into the theories which justify the modern movement in art and literature.

All neat schematisms with permanent and absolute distinctions, classifications with absolute pretensions, systems with pigeon-holes, etc., have this character (of artificiality). All "classic", clean, cut and dried, "noble", fixed, "eternal", *Weltanschauungen* seem to me to violate the character with which life concretely comes and the expression which it bears of being, or at least of involving, a muddle and a struggle, with an "ever not quite" to all our formulas, and novelty and possibility for ever leaking in.

James has perhaps been unduly overshadowed by Bergson, but he remains, at least for the Anglo-Saxon world whose deep-seated empirical and practical sense of reality he so completely embodies, the typical transition figure of our epoch. He represents the dethroning of absolutism and idealism as well as the decay of scientific dogmatism; he belongs, as an initiating force, to the movement which has produced relativity in science, the analytical method in psychology, the empirical study of religion, and, finally, super-realism in art. It is a movement which has its dangers and even its disasters—and everything leads us to suppose that James would have regarded fascism as one of the disasters; but essential to this movement is the doctrine of heroism. "The great use of a life", he once said, "is to spend it for something that outlasts it." We lack a better faith.

### 46. *The Poet and the Film*

EVERY work of art is a product of the creative imagination, and to be worthy of the name of art, the film, too, must be a product of the creative imagination.



## A Coat of Many Colours

Before such a sentence can mean much, however, we must define that vague phrase, "the creative imagination". I do not particularly like to use the word "creative" in this connection. It imputes to the artist a god-like rôle and that is bad for his conceit. There is nothing new under the sun, and all the greatest artist can do is to discover new arrangements of existing elements. That is not really to be creative : it is re-creative, amusing, illuminative, instructive, affecting. But my excuse for using the word "creative" in conjunction with "imagination" is to imply something more than a merely mental activity. Not merely imagination, but imagination *embodied*. Imagination finding its objective equivalents in sight and sound and touch. Imagination translated into sensible shapes, tones and textures.

But imagination itself is a vague word. What do we mean by it? The meaning of imagination has been discussed for well over two thousand years. It is discussed very acutely by Aristotle, and from Aristotle the discussion passes to the great tradition of mediæval scholasticism ; and from that tradition it passed into the school of romantic criticism, notably, in this country, to Coleridge ; and we are still discussing the meaning of imagination. Meanwhile, in the seventeenth century a school of philosophy arose, led by Descartes, which denied the existence of imagination, or regarded it as so inferior to reason that it could and should be ignored. That school of philosophy held the field between the decline of scholasticism and the rise of romanticism, and the period of its predominance is sometimes called the Age of Reason or Enlightenment : it is an age of derivative styles in art. Imagination, we may conclude, is essential to art, though it may be opposed to reason. A rational work of art—that sounds like a contradiction in terms and I think is a contradiction in terms : it is a contradiction

## The Poet and the Film

involved in the aims and methods of many modern film producers.

The centuries-long discussion of imagination to which I have referred succeeded in making a distinction between *ingenium* and *fantasia*: between fancy and imagination. This distinction was not always kept clear, because with that depressing desire to reduce all things to a unity which distinguishes philosophers, there has always been a tendency to reduce *ingenium* and *fantasia* to one faculty and call it the imagination. It has necessarily been a vain ambition, for actually two very distinct processes are involved.

*Ingenium* may be defined as the capacity to perceive or discover similitudes between otherwise disparate objects. We say that a person is as cool as a cucumber, by which we mean that we perceive this common element of coolness in two such disparate objects as such a person and a cucumber. Or describing the action of a man who is holding stocks in a rising market, we say that he is freezing on to a good thing, as water freezes to cold metal. These are elementary examples of simile and metaphor, but the whole art of poetry originates in such an activity. When the choice of terms in such comparisons is arbitrary (as it is in the case of the cucumber, because other things are cool besides the cucumber) then the activity might be called fancy or fantasy, and it is what Coleridge called a mode of memory emancipated from the order of space and time; it is an activity of the will involving choice—a choice of objective and definite things which can be brought into some illuminating association.

But *ingenium*, fancy, wit or whatever we are to call it, does not exhaust the activities of the mind engaged in literary creation. There is another process which begins with a state of emotional tension and to this nucleus of feeling attracts the objects or events which objectify or express the feeling. Such objects or events are no longer

## A Coat of Many Colours

arbitrary, but exact and necessary. Everything, as it were, must conform to the colour and force of the original emotion. The power of imagination, to quote Coleridge again, reveals itself in a balance and reconciliation of "a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession combined with enthusiasm and feeling profound and vehement".

The film produces its effect by projected images. These images, projected on the screen, are associated immediately with the images stored in the memory of the spectator, and from that association or collocation of images flow the emotions of surprise, delight, pleasure, pride or sorrow, which we experience in the picture house.

From this dependence on the visual image, there has arisen the notion that the film can only succeed as an art by avoiding all abstractions, by confining itself rigorously to the concrete image. Salvador Dali, who has written the scenario for an ultra-modern film called *Babaouo*, writes in the following strain :

Contrary to the usual opinion, the cinema is infinitely poorer and more limited for the expression of real processes of thought than is literature, painting, sculpture or architecture. About the only form below it is music, whose spiritual value, as everyone knows, is almost nil. The cinema is linked fundamentally, by its very nature, to the sensorial, vulgar and anecdotic surface of phenomena, to abstraction, to rhythmical impressions, in a word, to harmony. And harmony, the sublime product of abstraction, is by definition at the other extreme to the concrete, and consequently, to poetry.

The rapid and continuous succession of images on the screen . . . hinders all attempts to achieve the concrete and annuls more often than not (thanks to the element memory) its intentional, affective, lyrical quality. The mechanism of memory, upon which these images act in a manner exceptionally direct, tends even in itself to the disorganization of the concrete, towards idealization.

## The Poet and the Film

In waking life, the latent purpose and the fury of the concrete nearly always become submerged in forgetfulness, but they rise to the surface again in dreams. The poetry of the film demands more than any other kind of poetry a complete dream metamorphosis in concrete irrationality before it can attain a real degree of lyricism.

And on the basis of that idea we have in France the *surréaliste* film—a film that is completely irrational in its content, a film that can only be compared with the dream, even with the nightmare, and which gains all its force and vividness by possessing the same characteristics as the dream. The foremost film of this kind is Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*—A Poet's Blood—with music by Georges Auric. It is a vital experiment in film construction and it is the work of a poet—not of a camera-man, a kinist, a filmist or whatever you want to call the creator of a film, but of a man who is first and foremost and all the time a poet.

This kind of film fits exactly, I think, our definition of fancy—a mode of memory emancipated from space and time. Its appeal depends on its concreteness, its irrationality, its strange dream-like fertility of images. Admittedly, it is an extreme—just as lyric poetry is an extreme of expression. It rejects the logical: it seeks the lyrical appeal, the direct sensation of the concrete. The only commercial films which a surrealist like Dali can accept are apparently those of the Marx Brothers. But the elements which dominate a film like Cocteau's or *Animal Crackers* are elements present in most good films: the sudden projection of a concrete image to represent an abstract idea. The projection of two images to suggest a similitude: in *Turksib* the swirl of water followed by the flickering revolutions of cotton bobbins—a swift concrete effort to convey complex ideas of underlying processes of dynamic cause and effect. The danger which threatens this

## A Coat of Many Colours

kind of film is the *cliché* : the repetition of the same image in film after film—how often have we seen a close-up of corn waving against the sky, to suggest the peace of nature, of the wheels and piston of a locomotive to suggest travel, speed or power and so on. But that fault is due to a lack of the faculties which are so conspicuously absent from the film in general, the faculties which must come into the film to make it the great art which the potentialities of its technique suggest it may some day become—that is to say, the poetic faculty itself. To the absence of that faculty in the process of film production is due not only the poverty of film fantasy, but the almost total absence of the film of imagination.

The film of imagination—the film as a work of art ranking with great drama, great literature, and great painting—will not come until the poet enters the studio.

I know what is immediately advanced against that idea—the necessity of working in the strict terms of a new medium, exploiting a new technique : the camera is the film artist's muse : down with the literary film and so on.

About such a point of view I have only two things to say :—firstly, that in every art there is a good deal of cant spoken about technique. Most techniques can be learnt in a few days, at the most in a year or two. But no amount of technical efficiency will create a work of art in any medium if the creative or imaginative genius is lacking. Naturally the technique must appeal to the sensibility of the poet : he must love his medium and work in it with enthusiasm : but the vision necessary to create not merely the means, but the end—that is a gift of providence and we call that gift poetic genius.

Secondly, those people who deny that there can be any connection between the scenario and literature seem to me to have a wrong conception, not so much of the film as of literature. Literature they seem to regard as something

## The Poet and the Film

polite and academic, in other words, as something god-forsaken and superannuated, compounded of correct grammar and high-sounding ciceronian phrases. Such a conception reveals the feebleness of their sensibility. If I were asked to give the most distinctive quality of good writing, I should express it in this one word: VISUAL. Reduce the art of writing to its fundamentals and you come to this single aim: to convey images by means of words. But to *convey images*. To make the mind see. To project on to that inner screen of the brain a moving picture of objects and events, events and objects moving towards a balance and reconciliation of a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order. That is a definition of good literature—of the achievement of every good poet—from Homer and Shakespeare to James Joyce or Henry Miller. It is also a definition of the ideal film.

### 47. *The Message of Ruskin*

THERE is a well-established type of writer to whom we give the name "essayist"—in England it includes Francis Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, and the essay as a literary form, though it is free and adaptable, is fairly clearly defined. But I would hesitate to call Ruskin an essayist. An essayist is generally something of a *dilettante*—a man who may, indeed, be inspired, but who is always rather short of breath. That description does not fit Ruskin's fire and fury—the *sustained* flight of his rhetoric and imagination. Ruskin reminds us rather of one of the prophets of the Old Testament, of an Indian seer or a Chinese sage, or of one of the great English preachers, Jeremy Taylor, or Richard Hooker: he himself preferred the title of Teacher. But nevertheless, Ruskin was a creative writer in the same sense that Shakespeare or Milton

## A Coat of Many Colours

or Wordsworth or any other master of English literature. His creative use of language is sufficient proof of that—in my opinion there is no English writer who has written such magnificent prose. But that is not all—Ruskin would not rank as one of the major figures in our literature if he was merely the author of a number of purple passages. Ruskin is great for *what* he writes no less than for *how* he writes. The conclusion we must come to, I would like to suggest, is that with Ruskin, as to some extent also with his contemporary Carlyle, criticism is for the first time raised to the rank of an independent art. Naturally there were critics before this time—Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge—but with them criticism was either ancillary to their creative work (as it were, a clearing of the ground), or it was a very prosaic and logical activity in no way comparable to the imaginative art of the poet or the dramatist. It was the distinction of Ruskin in England, as of the very comparable figure of Nietzsche in Germany, to raise criticism to the creative level.

Now, one might speculate at some length on this new development in literature, for it is undoubtedly a phenomenon which has its explanation in the peculiar character of modern civilization. That civilization, we might say, has reached a point of spiritual disintegration at which the poet can no longer confidently create—no longer build on foundations which he feels are secure. So he becomes prophet: he becomes preacher. It has been the fashion to call such writers as Ruskin and Nietzsche “frustrated poets”. But who, of their time or since their time, has not been in some sense frustrated? Tennyson and Arnold, Browning and Hardy—the work of all these poets is in some measure disturbed and distorted by the prevailing uneasiness of the age.

One of the best, and certainly one of the best-known of Ruskin's books, *Sesame and Lilies*, is essentially an analysis

## The Message of Ruskin

of this problem—the problem of the relation of art to the prevailing *ethos*, or spiritual atmosphere. *Sesame and Lilies* was originally delivered as lectures in the year 1864, and when published in book form the following year became Ruskin's first popular success. It has been said that this success was due to the supposed suitability of the book as a prize for young ladies leaving school, and it does indeed contain some very good advice for such young ladies. But we do not need to look beyond the book's inherent eloquence and general aptness for an explanation. A particularly big nail was protruding into the public conscience, and Ruskin hit it squarely and forcibly on the head. He had seen coming into vogue what he called

a mass of realistic, or materialistic, literature and art, founded mainly on the theory of nobody's having any will, or needing any master: much of it extremely clever, irresistibly amusing, and enticingly pathetic: but which is nevertheless the mere whirr and dust-cloud of a dissolutely reforming and vulgarly manufacturing age.

Against this tendency Ruskin was passionately anxious to affirm that "there is such a thing as essential good, and essential evil, in books, in art, and in character"; and that "this essential goodness and badness are independent of epochs, fashions, opinions and revolutions".

Ruskin also stated that his book "was written while his energies were still unbroken and his temper unfettered": and that together with *Unto this Last* it contained the chief truths he had endeavoured through all his past life to display. *Unto this Last* is concerned chiefly with his economic doctrines, and we may therefore regard *Sesame and Lilies* as his æsthetic testament, the essence of his teaching on art.

Perhaps because he had already written so much on the plastic arts—so much, let me interject, that is still worth reading—perhaps for this reason Ruskin concentrates in this book on the art of writing. He begins by asking why



## A Coat of Many Colours

a book is written and published, and arrives at the conclusion that it is not with a view of mere communication, but of permanence. The author desires, not merely to multiply his voice, or convey it, but to *perpetuate* it.

The author [says Ruskin] has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one has yet said it : so far as he knows, no one else can say it. He is bound to say it, clearly and melodiously if he may : clearly, at all events. In the sum of his life he finds this to be the thing, or group of things, manifest to him :—this, the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down for ever : engrave it on rock, if he could ; saying, “ This is the best of me ; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved, and hated, like another : my life was as the vapour, and is not : but this I saw and knew : this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory.” That is his “ writing ” : it is, in his small way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription, or scripture. That is a “ Book ”.

This interpretation of a man's book as his personal scripture, his small and perhaps insignificant but nevertheless inspired Bible, is entirely characteristic of Ruskin. It explains why he then goes on to insist on the importance of words. “ I tell you earnestly and authoritatively, (I *know* I am right in this,) you must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable—nay, letter by letter ”, and he suggests that it is no mere accident that the study of books is called literature, and a man versed in literature a man of letters rather than a man of books, or of words. All he says of the study of words, the love of words, the hierarchy of words, is excellent, but now I have only the desire to repeat his warning against the *false* use of words, because it is so appropriate for the circumstances of our own time.

## The Message of Ruskin

There are masked words droning and skulking about us in Europe just now [he writes], there are masked words abroad which nobody understands, but which everybody uses, and most people will also fight for, live for, or even die for, fancying they mean this or that, or the other, of things dear to them : for such words wear chamæleon cloaks—"ground-lion" cloaks, of the colour of the ground of any man's fancy : on that ground they lie and wait, and rend him with a spring from it. There never were creatures of prey so mischievous, never diplomatists so cunning, never poisoners so deadly, as these masked words : they are the unjust stewards of all men's ideas : whatever fancy or favourite instinct a man most cherishes, he gives to his favourite masked word to take care of for him : the word at last comes to have an infinite power over him—you cannot get at him but by its ministry.

I can only, in this short essay, emphasize a few of the more significant truths which are packed into this little book. I must pass over the acute analysis of a passage from Milton's *Lycidas*—it is one of the high points of English literary criticism : I must pass over his beautiful defence of the *indecisiveness* of the great poets—the fact that the most they can do is "to mix the music with our thoughts, and sadden us with heavenly doubts". But I must insist on Ruskin's defence of what he calls passion or sensation, for it is the key to his whole philosophy of art, and of life. It is essentially the same doctrine as that expressed by Keats in a famous letter which must have been familiar to Ruskin. In Ruskin's words : "The ennobling difference between one man and another,—between one animal and another,—is precisely in this, that one feels more than another. . . . We are only human in so far as we are sensitive, and our honour is precisely in proportion to our passion."

The truth of this statement is perhaps best seen by expressing it negatively, which Ruskin proceeds to do. The absence of sensation is simply vulgarity.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Simple and innocent vulgarity is merely an untrained and undeveloped bluntness of body and mind : but in true inbred vulgarity, there is a dreadful callousness, which, in extremity, becomes capable of every sort of bestial habit and crime, without fear, without pleasure, without horror, and without pity. It is in the blunt hand and the dead heart, in the diseased habit, in the hardened conscience, that men become vulgar : they are for ever vulgar, precisely in proportion as they are incapable of sympathy—of quick understanding,—of all that, in deep insistence on the common, but most accurate term, may be called the “tact” or “touch-faculty”, of body and soul : that tact which the *Mimosa* has in trees, which the pure woman has above all creatures ; fineness and fullness of sensation, beyond reason :—the guide and sanctifier of reason itself. Reason can but determine what is true :—it is the God-given passion of humanity which alone can recognize what God has made good.

Ruskin adds to this fiery declaration of faith the corollary that true passion is disciplined and tested passion, but it is precisely this control of passion or sensation which is the proper function of art, making it so relevant to the fundamental needs of life. I do not want to disguise the fact that Ruskin was first and foremost a moralist, and that he tended to make statements subordinating art and everything else to ethics. He is never tired of telling us that no great art was ever created by a bad man, and if we have a conventional view of badness or immorality, such statements may seem obviously untrue. But Ruskin's idea of good and evil was not conventional : it was intimately linked up with this doctrine of sensation. The goodness of a man is a question of his sensibility ; it is the goodness of his heart, not of his brain. When Ruskin defines the qualities of a great man, as he does in the case of Sir Walter Scott, these qualities—humility, absence of affectation, ease of expression, simplicity of vision—these are all sensitive qualities, even nervous qualities. They have

## Etruscan Art

nothing to do with codes of morality or systems of dogma. "Mighty of heart, mighty of mind—magnanimous—to be this, is indeed to be great in life, to 'advance in life',—in life itself—not in the trappings of it. . . . He only is advancing in life, whose heart is getting softer, whose blood warmer, whose brain quicker, whose spirit is entering into living peace."

### 48. *Etruscan Art*

ETRUSCAN art, like early Hellenic art, early Gothic art, negro art and primitive art generally, is one of those phases of art which have soared in public estimation during the last twenty or thirty years. This revolution in opinion has been the work of painters, poets and critics rather than of professional archæologists and classicists. There are still scholars for whom Etruscan sculpture is "inglorious", "vulgar", "superficial", "brutalized"—expressions of contempt whose very strength betrays an irrational prejudice. That prejudice is in favour of naturalism, of Hellenic realism, of Hellenic idealism, but whatever its nature it is very general and has led, not only to an extraordinary and unscientific distortion of the history of art, but also to a complete inability to understand (and even to translate) those classical theories of art, such as Plato's, which were free from this prejudice. But that is another story.

D. H. Lawrence called Etruscan art the supreme art of all times and all nations. The statement is no doubt considered as a wilful exaggeration by all those scholars and critics who value a reputation for objectivity, but I think it needs very little amendment to be acceptable. Etruscan art undoubtedly belongs to the most supreme *type* of art of all times and nations. Like Oriental art and Gothic art, it is what is perhaps best described as a trans-

## A Coat of Many Colours

cidental art. This is admittedly a dangerous term, with all kinds of theological and philosophical implications ; but its simple meaning is that ideas exist which are superior to, and not deduced from, ordinary human experience or ascertainable fact ; and a transcendental art is an art which attempts to express such ideas rather than to imitate natural appearances. It is not implied that there is a complete division between idea and fact ; indeed, there is an intimate relationship, and nature itself is the imitation or representation of an Idea. Art and nature are therefore analogous : they are both representations of ideas, and we can best learn how to represent an idea by observing the operations of nature. " Art is the imitation of Nature in her manner of operation ", is the way St. Thomas Aquinas describes it ; and it is implied that art is not the imitation of nature in her manner of appearance.

Once this important distinction is grasped, we have the key to the distinction between representational and non-representational art, between realistic and transcendental art, between Roman and Etruscan art. It will be seen that it is more than a difference in degree ; it is a fundamental difference in kind, and once it is realized in all its implications I do not think anyone can fail to recognize that it is a difference in value. One can, of course, deny all spiritual values, and reduce man to a clever animal. It is conceivable that a clever monkey might reproduce the appearance of a natural object in paint or clay. But a clever monkey would never be able to express an idea for which there is no natural or inevitable prototype. We have very little direct knowledge of the Etruscans. We do not know for certain where they came from, or with what races they mixed ; we cannot interpret their inscriptions, and their literature, like their wooden architecture, has almost totally disappeared. But we know from the remnants of their art which we do still possess that they

## Walter de la Mare

were a race of almost terrifying vitality—what is more terrifying in European art than the Chimæra from Arezzo in the Museum at Florence? We also recognize in this same art the presence of supernatural or superreal qualities which express a mystical rather than a rationalistic attitude towards life. These qualities, strong and unequivocal in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., gradually weaken and disappear as the race loses its social and economic cohesion and integrity—they merge into the cosmopolitan idealism of the Græco-Roman world. Into that melting-pot, and its modern equivalents, most of the integrity and clarity of human art has disappeared.

### 49. *Walter de la Mare*

WALTER DE LA MARE survives from a pre-war world—his most famous and most characteristic volumes were published in 1912 (*The Listeners*) and 1913 (*Peacock Pie*). Who else has survived from this period: from the generation that was formed in the 'nineties or earlier, and came to maturity before 1914? Abercrombie and Binyon do not seem to me to enter into the question; Edward Thomas and Rupert Brooke were in some sense formed by the war—their best poetry is of the war epoch; Yeats survives as a reconstituted post-war poet. The early Yeats might yield some fruitful comparisons; the author of *A Child's Garden of Verses* some immaterial ones: but for the true measure of our poet we must go back to one who is at first sight and superficially so different—to Thomas Hardy. De la Mare, like Hardy, belongs to and is the greatest living representative of that specifically English tradition, which is neither Celtic nor Symbolist, but something as autochthonous as the fools and fairies of Shakespeare. But already, perhaps, a distinction can be made—one

## A Coat of Many Colours

which brings De la Mare more into line with Shakespeare than with Hardy. Hardy, like Yeats—like so many of the best modern poets—is a regionalist : his work springs from a specific soil. But I defy anyone to deduce from De la Mare's poetry that he was born in Kent and spent his youth in London. His world is quite literally a dream world : it has no local habitation. I cannot see that this is necessarily a failing : I am all in favour, politically speaking, of devolution, regionalism and the parish-pump, but I think that it is highly civilized to think, and write, universally. For this does not necessarily imply a lack of that most essential poetic quality, precision. De la Mare has more precision, both of image and expression, than Yeats : in this respect, if in no other, he is the peer of Hardy.

Technically speaking, indeed, he has delicacies and nuances beyond the reach of Hardy's crisp but coarse homespun. Hardy never wrote anything so magical as the "Epitaph" ("Here lies a most beautiful lady . . .") nor was he capable of the authentic ballad thrill which we get in *The Listeners*. Both poets indulge in archaisms which are odd and ungracious to the modern ear—oh's and lo's, unnecessary inversions and, worst of all, the word italicized for an emphasis the rhythm should have conveyed : syntax is often outraged for the sake of a rhyme. Both poets have preserved too many trivia ; they make most effect in selected volumes, though more than one selection is possible—indeed, both poets seem to invite us to make our own selection. For a generation so self-consciously technical as the one between the wars these have been portentously exaggerated flaws. They don't seem to matter so much now : the patina of time has crept over them, leaving the form homogeneous.

The comparison with Hardy will reveal a difference of more serious significance. Both poets are what we call

## Walter de la Mare

objective : they keep their eyes on the object. Both poets are apt to moralize—Hardy habitually. But how differently ! The poems are often so parallel in theme and composition that the experiment of confronting them becomes “exact”—and exacting. Let us take the concluding verse of Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush” :

So little cause for carollings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

In De la Mare’s poem, “The Riddlers”, a blackbird asks the nightingale why, when all other birds are at rest, he delights “to make music for sorrow’s sake”, and after giving the nightingale’s reply, the poet muses thus :

Thus, then, these two small birds, perched there,  
Breathed a strange riddle both did share  
Yet neither could expound.  
And we—who sing but as we can,  
In the small knowledge of a man—  
Have we an answer found ?  
Nay, some are happy whose delight  
Is hid even in themselves from sight ;  
And some win peace who spend  
The skill of words to sweeten despair  
Of finding consolation where  
Life has but one dark end ;  
Who, in rapt solitude, tell o’er  
A tale as lovely as forelore,  
Into the midnight air.

There is in both poems the same depreciation of human knowledge as against animal faith : but whereas in De la Mare we have merely the statement of a paradox (consolation in despair), in Hardy we have a suggestion of trans-



## A Coat of Many Colours

cendentalism, a distinctly metaphysical concept of Hope emerging from the bleak wintry landscape and the *fin-de-siècle* pessimism (the poem was written in December, 1900). To those who think of De la Mare as a poet of childhood and fairyland, of ghosts and goblins, this may seem to be pressing an unfair point; but actually the amount of would-be philosophical and meditative verse in the *Collected Poems* is considerable: it is summarized in a long concluding poem entitled "Dreams", whose concluding stanzas give the substance of this insubstantial system of thought:

Starven with cares, like tares in wheat,  
Wildered with knowledge, chilled with doubt,  
The timeless self in vain must beat  
Against its walls to hasten out  
Whither the living waters fount;  
And—evil and good! no more at strife—  
Seek love beneath the tree of life.

When then in memory I look back  
To childhood's visioned hours I see  
What now my anxious soul doth lack  
Is energy in peace to be  
At one with nature's mystery:  
And Conscience less my mind indicts  
For idle days than dreamless nights.

The visionary innocence of childhood and the timeless reality of dreams—these are the two values which Mr. De la Mare has affirmed, not only in his poems, but in his more polemical prose works. They are the values affirmed by an earlier English poet—William Blake; but De la Mare is curiously unlike Blake, simply because he is not in any strict sense a mystic. For the poet nearest in spirit as in form we must go farther back—to the seventeenth century and to Robert Herrick, a poet we often quote but do not sufficiently consider. With some allowance for period changes, the furniture of these two minds is almost identical.

## Walter de la Mare

Now it happens that Herrick has left us, in a short poem in his *Hesperides*, a precise inventory of his subjects :

I sing of *Brooks*, of *Blossomes*, *Birds*, and *Bowers* :  
Of *April*, *May*, of *June*, and *July-flowers*  
I sing of *May-poles*, *Hock-carts*, *Wassails*, *Wakes*,  
Of *Bride-grooms*, *Brides*, and of their *Bridall-cakes*.  
I write of *Youth*, of *Love*, and have *Acesse*  
By these, to sing of cleanly *Wantonnesse* ;  
I sing of *Dewes*, of *Raines*, and piece by piece,  
Of *Balme*, of *Oyle*, of *Spice*, and *Ambergreece*.  
I sing of *Times trans-shifting* ; and I write  
How *Roses* first came *Red*, and *Lillies White*.  
I write of *Groves*, of *Twilights*, and I sing  
The Court of *Mab*, and of the *Faerie-King*.  
I write of *Hell* ; I sing (and ever shall)  
Of *Heaven*, and hope to have it after all.

Walter de la Mare could not write a similar catalogue of his own themes without repeating all but two of these items. The omissions would be significant. There is no wantonness in De la Mare's poetry, cleanly or otherwise : his work is almost completely devoid of eroticism. Even when he treats an erotic theme at second hand, as in his poems on Imogen and Ophelia, the heart is sterilized, the image cold and glassy. The other missing theme is the last named by Herrick. There is a Hell in De la Mare's poetry, if only the hell of lost innocence, of ruined minds and haunted places : that sense of terror-in-beauty so well expressed in "The Children of Stare". But though the poet can write of "the awful breath of God", he has been too infected with Hardy's pessimism to sing of Heaven, and to hope to have it after all. In a poem on Thomas Hardy he writes :

"O Master", I cried in my heart, "lorn thy tidings,  
grievous thy song ;  
Yet thine, too, this solacing music, as we earthfolk  
stumble, along."

## A Coat of Many Colours

Earthfolk, without any expectation of heaven—in expressing this state of unbelief De la Mare has been true to the mental climate of his own age.

That age, we can claim without self-pity (especially on the threshold of another age) is not one in which poets have found much spiritual sustenance : and if they have been called upon to supply that spirituality, it has not always been to the benefit of their poetry—Hardy is a sufficient illustration of that fact. Oliver Elton once wrote of Herrick : “ A stormy age is incomplete without at least one artist who sits by himself and cares only for his craft.” It is a thought which in our time we may reserve for Walter de la Mare.

### 50. *Jean Hélion*

IT is generally assumed that Cubism is dead ; and if by Cubism we mean that phase of modern painting which aimed at resolving the apparent surfaces of objects into a formal system of planes and angles, that is no doubt true. Art can never survive if it is limited to a formula : it must consistently develop and its continuity is, at least by analogy, organic.

But Cubism did not end in a formula : it grew into the wider movement of non-representational art which includes Cubism but which has become something profounder, something more fundamentally revolutionary. Cubism was a beginning and not an end—a revelation of unsuspected potentialities in an age of decadence and disintegration.

In the later stages of that development Jean Hélion has played a significant part. He is still a young painter, but from the beginning of his career his work has shown an intellectual coherence which makes him already seem one

## Jean Hélion

of the most mature leaders of the modern movement in the direct line of descent from Cézanne, Seurat, Gris and Léger.

His particular preoccupation has been to carry Cubism from the static condition which was the inevitable result of its analytical approach to nature, forward to a dynamic condition, which condition still retains the essential features of the discoveries made by Picasso, Kandinsky, Gris and Léger.

Whilst retaining, that is to say, the intellectual clarity of abstract design, Hélion wishes to make that design once more an affair of movement, a dramatic action within a three-dimensional world.

To do this he has increased the complexity of his compositions, controlling more and more individual forms and specific colours within a unity of design, but never losing the clarity due to an intellectual control of that design.

The increase of individual forms has implied, *pari passu*, an increase in the organization of colour harmony ; hard scientific research into the possibilities of colour ; realization of these researches in the potentialities of composition.

Complexity is gained, but without any clogging of the vision. For the forms, once realized in relation to the colours and the pitch of the colours, must then *move*. They move, as colours, by the balance and ordered recession of their pitch : blue sinking, red rising, yellow spreading (process of halation) ; subtleties of shift and emphasis beyond verbal description.

With these elements, mass can be made to move, as it moves in baroque architecture. As baroque is to classical architecture (dynamic to static), so is Hélion to the classical cubism of Juan Gris. It is significant that Hélion is fascinated, among painters of the past, by Poussin.

Where will this development lead to ? (We must ask such a question because Hélion is a painter in transition—

## A Coat of Many Colours

his solution not found, his style not established.) Héliou himself does not know, but he is not afraid of the future—he would, in fact, welcome a way back to social integration, to a functional art of some kind. But such a development will never come about by a concession on the painter's part ; it can only come through the inherent development of his strictly æsthetic ideals. It is for society to catch up with the artist—not vice versa. And such has always been the rule. The great artists of the past never put a brake on their development so that “ the people ” could catch up. Art is conditioned by the highest intellectual understanding of a period ; or is inferior and decadent. Even when art was most socialized and “ integrated ”, the actual business of patronage was still in the hands of an exclusive clique of connoisseurs—the higher ranks of the priesthood in the Middle Ages, for example. The people accepted the art that was imposed on them ; we have absolutely no evidence that they understood it or appreciated it—especially no evidence that they appreciated it for the æsthetic values which constitute its title to be called art. Art is socially functional, but it has always functioned through the intellectual élite of any period. Any other view would compel us to reverse our values, and to exalt peasant art above the art of the élite. Admittedly the élite themselves are a function of the sociological process of history. And admittedly the proletariat of to-day is the élite of to-morrow.

These general reflections are not remote from the art of Héliou, for we, the critics and apologists of the modern movement, are increasingly impelled to justify the social relevance of such art. Society to-day is disunited ; there is no accepted mythology on which the artist can rely for a medium of communication. The élite, in this decaying stage of capitalism, feels insecure, is without intellectual confidence, and therefore aimlessly *dilettante*. We live, it is only too obvious, in an age of transition.

## Jean Héliou

What can the artist do in such an age—an age of transition which is going to outlast his own lifetime? If he refuses to be a mere time-server, he can only withdraw upon himself, creating his own world, his own public—a happy few who will appreciate the æsthetic values which he embodies in his abstractions and fantasies. That dilemma, for an artist like Héliou, is inevitable. In the present spiritual and economic condition of Europe, there should be no question of the choice to be made.

The values of this age, in so far as they are social values, are not spiritual values. They are values of wealth, comfort, amusement, excitement, sexual stimulation, and what might be generically called *dope*—modes of escape from the horror of a materialistic world. There are no other values which can in any sense of the words be called both social and spiritual. There is no spiritual integrity in our life, and no artist of any worth will put his skill and sensibility at the service of any less worthy cause. An artist will serve either the light within him, or the light of humanity embodied in a superhuman conception of reality. But there is no superhuman conception of reality which is valid in the modern world, and therefore an artist like Héliou must remain true to the only reality of which he has knowledge—the subjective reality of his own vision. With this vision he interprets the world and his art remains relatively limited and individual. But so long as the artist is honest, his vision will have more than a personal value. For we all, in our baffled way, are compelled to construct a personal vision, but few of us can find a mode of realizing our intimations in an objective fashion. We rely, therefore, on those rare individuals whose sensibility is geared to materials—to colours, metals, stones, sounds and words—and who can by virtue of that faculty convert their visions into works of art : objects in which we may see the form, if not the substance, of reality.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 51. *Kierkegaard*

KIERKEGAARD, like Marx, is a product by reaction of Hegel. Hegel had at least this virtue : he left behind him a progeny, not of slavish disciples, but of active intelligences, and among these Kierkegaard and Marx represent the widest possible extremes of thought. For whilst Marx turned the Hegelian dialectic outwards, making it an instrument with which he could interpret the facts of history and so arrive at an objective science which insists on the translation of theory into action, Kierkegaard, on the other hand, turned the same instrument inwards, for the examination of his own soul or psychology, arriving at a subjective philosophy which involved him in the deepest pessimism and despair of action. To what extent either Kierkegaard or Marx rightly interpreted Hegel is only an academic question ; but for the extremist—and every philosopher or lover of the truth is an extremist—they represent the only possible alternatives to-day. The significance of Marx is evident enough, and becomes more evident with the progress of economic affairs ; the significance of Kierkegaard is recognized abroad, by Protestant theologians like Barth, and, at first sight more surprisingly, by Catholic theologians. His chief advocate and best translator in Germany, Theodor Haecker, is a Catholic ; and most of the people in this country who take any serious interest in him are Catholics. But Kierkegaard himself was never a Catholic ; he was a son of Lutheran parents and intended for the Lutheran ministry, but he spent his intense life, not in hovering between one sect and another, but in a vain struggle to reconcile himself to Christianity itself. It is because in this struggle he revealed the inner meaning and consequences of the Christian faith more clearly and more acutely than any mystic since Pascal that he exercises

## Kierkegaard

such an attraction for Christians to-day. It is open to them, of course, to say that Kierkegaard was never vouchsafed the final grace which would have perfected his faith ; but the fact remains that only a very few mystics like Meister Eckhart and Pascal have written so illuminatingly on the Christian Mysteries.

It would be a mistake, however, to give the impression that Kierkegaard is only concerned with Christianity ; his range is much wider. He was, in fact, an individual in conflict with all the tendencies—philosophical, political and cultural—of his time. He refused, that is to say, to keep his religion in a separate compartment of his mind, but the more he realized the implications of that religion, the more he found it impossible to reconcile himself with the tendencies of his time—which are still the tendencies of our time. He was, in short, the complete personalist, in the sense in which Berdyaev to-day uses the term. Truth, he would say, is in the person believing and not in the proposition believed. This principle of the subjectivity of truth he carried into every sphere of knowledge—into ethics and æsthetics, for example. It is in the latter sphere that I personally find him so illuminating, his doctrine of *Innerlichkeit* being of the essence of any real understanding of poetic creation.

I have called Kierkegaard a mystic, but that is one of the points in dispute. In so far as the word implies a being of a rare and superior kind, Kierkegaard would have rejected it. But there is no doubt that some of his experiences, as recorded in his *Journals* and other writings, imply a direct or “ inspired ” relationship with God which we should normally describe as mystical. But Kierkegaard was also a dialectician, trained in the logic of Hegel ; with the result that he is in no sense naïve or simple. He is, indeed, one of the subtlest thinkers that ever lived, and though many of his readers go to him for a confirmation



## A Coat of Many Colours

or elaboration of their Christian faith, he is quite capable of attracting others by the quality rather than the content of his thought.

Kierkegaard was the son of a well-to-do Danish merchant, and during his life was never under the necessity of earning a living. His father was excessively severe and gloomy, a fanatic labouring under a sense of guilt and remorse. Kierkegaard many times deplores his early upbringing, and utters warnings which still have their force—for example :

If the child is not allowed, as he should be, to play innocently with holy things, if his existence is sternly forced into the decisive Christian concepts, such a child will have to suffer much. Such an upbringing will either, by inhibiting immediacy, result in despondency and anguished dread, or else incite the lusts of pleasure and the anguish of lust in a measure which even paganism did not know.

This describes Kierkegaard's own case. His first reaction was towards the lusts of pleasure, but then, after one of the mystical experiences referred to, he returned to a condition of dread and anguish, out of which he slowly built up his spiritual faith. He elaborated his famous dilemma, his "either—or"—either the æsthetic life or the ethical. He came to the conclusion that the æsthetic life—"living in the moment", as he called it—always entailed despair. He insisted that the choice is not to be avoided—that if we do not make it, as an act of freedom, the choice will be made for us, by obscure movements in our unconscious or impersonal self. On the inevitability of that dilemma the whole of Kierkegaard's philosophy depends. Personally I do not believe that the choice is free. In Kierkegaard's own case it was so obviously conditioned by the circumstances of his childhood, by his physical disease and his depressive melancholia. His philosophy, beautiful in its intricacy and depth, sensitive to all the poetic and

## Kierkegaard

tragic aspects of life, is but a sublimation of this inherent suffering. But Kierkegaard was driven too far by his masochism. The story of his treatment of Regina Olsen—the young girl to whom he made love and to whom he became engaged, only to break off the engagement from “ethical” scruples—merely reveals to what fantastic heights (admittedly *heights*) the aberrations of the human spirit can reach. That in the end they lead to “the religious absolute” can scarcely justify the wanton sacrifice of another person’s feelings. Kierkegaard’s own comment (one of many !) was : “Either you throw yourself into wild diversions or religiousness absolute, of a different sort from that of the parsons.” The qualification is significant. Kierkegaard’s intense subjectivity, the very sincerity of his religious experiences, led him in the end into a bitter conflict with the organized Church. He had escaped one dilemma only to discover another : either Christ or the Church.

Kierkegaard is a new world of thought, a rare mental atmosphere in which we live dangerously, as many people have already discovered at the cost of their complacency. No book of his illustrates this truth better than *Stages on Life’s Way*, a “passion narrative” in the form of a long diary which is an intimate relation, stage by stage, of Kierkegaard’s own love story. This diary is preceded by “In Vino Veritas”, an account of a banquet in the manner of Plato’s *Symposium* and not unworthy of comparison with that supreme masterpiece : and by “Various Observations about Marriage”, a document in which a certain Judge Williams answers the objections which had been voiced at the Banquet. The Banquet is in effect a plea for keeping the sexual relationship on a superficial or sensuous level : woman is represented as the most seductive power in heaven and on earth, but man must not be caught by the bait. “The highest thing a woman can do for a man is to come

## A Coat of Many Colours

within his range of vision at the right instant—but that, after all, she cannot do, it is the kindness of fate—but then comes the greatest thing she can do for a man, and that is, to be unfaithful to him, the sooner the better.” That is to say, from this point of view it is only in a negative relationship that woman makes a man idealistically productive. Judge Williams presents a very different point of view: his “Observations” constitute, indeed, the most beautiful and profound defence of conjugal felicity ever written—and as Coventry Patmore once pointed out, this theme is of all great themes the most difficult and the most neglected. Marriage is the confirmation of love by resolution, rather, its transformation. “Love’s gait is light as the feet which dance upon the meadow, but resolution holds the tired one till the dance begins again.” It is only against this profound appreciation of the “validity” of marriage that we can measure the tragic significance of Kierkegaard’s own renunciation. For just as the ethical stage represented by the Judge is far beyond the erotic stage represented by the speakers at the Banquet, so beyond the ethical stage is the religious, towards which Kierkegaard was driven by a kind of demoniacal fury. He was fond of comparing himself with Periander, of whom it was said that he talked like a wise man and acted like a maniac. But it is perhaps more to the point to compare him with Abelard, whose “case” fascinated him, but about whom he never ventured to write at length. Kierkegaard was an Abelard—that is to say, a man dedicated to God—who resisted the temptation of his Héloïse. The accident that he was not a priest only made it more difficult to justify his action in breaking off his engagement, especially as his Regina was a comparatively simple girl without that sense of religious immediacy which alone would explain such inhuman conduct. There can be no doubt of the reality of Kierkegaard’s love for Regina—the “Diary” is the revelation

## Kierkegaard

of a tortured and divided mind, and in the subtlety of its introspection and analysis it reminds us of Proust. Granted the book is too long and too boring, written with that dialectical prolixity for which Hegel must be held responsible: nevertheless, it is of absorbing interest, not only for its diagnosis of the sexual relationship—its main theme—but also for its abundant asides, for the observations on nature and metaphysics, on poetry and music, on human suffering and human joy, which are to be found on almost every page. To begin reading Kierkegaard is to embark on a long journey, a journey which will be difficult and dangerous, but with such a reward at the end that all the incidental pain will be immediately forgotten.

The *Unscientific Postscript* is but one more voluminous commentary on the main theme of all Kierkegaard's work, the dilemma which he represented by the phrase "either-or": either æsthetic immediacy, which includes not only the eudæmonistic search for pleasure, but also despair (the "sickness unto death") and religious or metaphysical self-explanation; or the ethical along with the religion of immanence and immediacy and (as its culmination) Christianity apprehended as a paradox. In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard is chiefly concerned to define the nature of the religious alternative: to make it clear to his readers that it is not a choice between the æsthetic life and any sort of religion, but between true religion and every other possible alternative. And true religion is distinguished by its immediacy, without which it cannot live. Immediacy is opposed to reflection: it is direct apprehension, either by the senses or by intuition, and it is the only means by which we can apprehend "being". "Subjectivity is the truth", and it is upon this basis that Christianity must be interpreted and believed.

The *Unscientific Postscript* is an obscure and ungainly book, yet it has had an incalculable influence upon the develop-

## A Coat of Many Colours

ment of modern theology, and a so-called "existential philosophy" in Germany is largely based on it. When the late Professor Geismar of Copenhagen first read it, his mental excitement was so great that his physician had to forbid him reading anything of Kierkegaard's for a year. Dr. Lowrie, in his Introduction to the English edition, claims that no great work on philosophy or theology, if we except the Dialogues of Plato, has been written with so much wit, with so much art. The wit we must grant: the art we must question, and Kierkegaard himself seems to have disclaimed it. The subjective thinker, he says, has a style of his own; it is existential, which seems to mean that it has no form. "The subjective thinker does not have the poetic leisure to create in the medium of the imagination, nor does he have time for æsthetically disinterested elaboration." This is rather like making a virtue out of necessity, but it does state a fact which the reader must be prepared for: the nature and form of Kierkegaard's thought and style are not comparable to ordinary scientific exposition or æsthetic creation. You read Kierkegaard as you would swim with a tide: you immerse yourself totally in what is the most extraordinary flood of subjectivity ever poured from a philosophical mind.

Kierkegaard began his *Journals* in 1834, when he was twenty-one. Though nothing is truer than his statement that "everyone is essentially what they are to be when they are ten years old", it is nevertheless surprising to find with what sureness he has already discovered himself, decided on the nature of his personality and the course of his destiny. What is truth, he asks, but to live for an idea? In order to lead a complete human life "and not merely one of the understanding" he sees the necessity of basing the development of his thought upon "something which grows together with the deepest roots of my life, through which I am, so to speak, grafted upon the divine".

## Kierkegaard

It is with joy, and inwardly strengthened, that I contemplate those great men who have thus found the precious stone, for the sake of which they sell all, even their lives, whether I see them intervene forcefully in life, and without faltering go forward on the path marked out for them, or discover them remote from the highway, absorbed in themselves and in working for their noble aim. And I look with reverence even upon the errors which lie so near by. It is this divine side of man, his inward action which means everything, not a mass of information ; for that will certainly follow and then all that knowledge will not be a chance assemblage, or a succession of details, without system and without a focusing point. I too have certainly looked for such a centre.

It is only by realizing that Kierkegaard had set out with this determination to find a centre, to know himself before anything else, and thus to see his way through life, that we can understand the two decisive moments in his career—his refusal of marriage and his break with the official Church. As soon as he had become engaged to Regina Olsen, Kierkegaard realized that he had made a mistake. He thought of many ways out of his predicament, even suicide, but finally decided on self-abasement. He behaved as if he were “subtle, false and treacherous” with the object of killing her love for him. His action caused anger, resentment, bewilderment, and was never properly understood until the publication of his *Journals* ; but even with the help of his confession, it needs a certain effort of sympathy and perhaps a spiritual affinity to appreciate his motives. “It was a time of terrible suffering : to have to be so cruel and at the same time to love as I did. She fought like a tigress. If I had not believed that God had lodged a veto she would have been victorious.” God had lodged a veto—such love of God as Kierkegaard had conceived could not co-exist with the love of a human being. It compelled him to an asceticism as rigorous as that of the

## A Coat of Many Colours

saints ; and indeed, from this moment Kierkegaard's life was in every sense that of a saint. He is perhaps the most real saint of modern times.

This same intensity and integrity of spiritual experience inevitably brought him into conflict with the organized Church, or Christendom. His attack only became open and embittered towards the end of his life, and there is some truth in the suggestion that it had its origins as a psychological release from parental repression—from the oppressive fanaticism of a father overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. But the criticism of Christianity runs throughout the *Journals*, and is not confined to the Church ; we find him, for example, as early as 1835, contrasting the luxuriance of the Christian imagination when it deals with eternal suffering and torment with its poverty when it deals with the happiness of the chosen and the faithful. The Protestant Church of his own country receives the most frequent and the most fatal blows ; but Catholicism is not spared. At the same time, Kierkegaard's arguments can have little appeal to the sceptic or agnostic. Kierkegaard's "true inwardness" is a passion that pierces through all collective forms of religion to "the contemplation of God face to face".

It would be a mistake to give the impression, however, that the *Journals* are exclusively concerned with Kierkegaard's religious development. Kierkegaard was essentially a poet—a child of the Romantic Movement—and he analyses every aspect of life with profundity, with irony and often with lyrical feeling. His *Journals* have been compared with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Pensées* of Pascal and the *Apologia* of Newman ; they have something of the quality of all these great books, and still something more—something nearer to Nietzsche than to anything these other names convey, though Pascal is very near. But of the three spheres into which Kierkegaard divided

## Kierkegaard

existence—the æsthetic, the ethical, and the religious—it is only Nietzsche who rivals him in his understanding of the significance of the æsthetic.

In his study of this Danish philosopher, Theodor Haecker emphasizes the fact that Kierkegaard's work is so complex that it is possible for three classes of reader to occupy themselves with it independently of each other : the theologian, the philosopher and the critic. It is possible, however, that Kierkegaard himself would not have approved of such a separation. His criticism of Hegel is fundamental, but nothing in Hegel seemed to him so misleading as that evolutionary or historical distinction between the æsthetic, the religious and the rational faculties. For Kierkegaard the whole man included all three faculties in their full force, and the very object of philosophy was to reconcile them, to unite them in one synthesis. Kierkegaard's work is perhaps best regarded as a protest against the cul-de-sac of objective knowledge. Professor Swenson, to whom we owe a translation of the *Philosophical Fragments*, says :

In his case the entire energy of a great genius of reflection was expended upon the clarification of the realm of the subjective, which is the realm of spirit. There exists at present a school of thinkers whose fundamental principle it is to make a sharp cleavage between what they call "logical" and "emotive" significance, denying to the latter all verifiability, and hence all real truth or error. . . . The Kierkegaardian literature is not so much an argument against this view, which erects into a philosophical principle the vulgar prejudice which identifies the emotional with the structureless and the arbitrary, as it is a demonstration of its falsity through the actual production of a reflectively critical system of evaluations.

The dialectics of subjectivity might do as a phrase to describe Kierkegaard's philosophy, but always on the understanding that with such a philosophy he was necessarily, as Haecker brings out so clearly, a realist and not



## A Coat of Many Colours

an idealist. He made a break with European philosophy because he wished to go "from the person over the things to the person, and not from the things over the person to the things". It was his reflection on the being and essence of the person that brought him to that demonstration of the existence of God with which the *Fragments* are concerned. It is not possible to explain shortly the particular evidence or experience which Kierkegaard called the Moment or the Absolute Paradox, nor the dialectical method which forced on him the recognition and acceptance of God. It is sufficient to note that Christians of widely different views are united in their praise of the beauty and acceptability of this demonstration. Kierkegaard, more deeply than any other modern philosopher, had pierced to the heart of the Christian mystery. But then? If we are to accept Kierkegaard's own last works as his final message, it involved an utter condemnation of organized Christianity. "Officialdom is incommensurable with Christianity"—that was his final message, and it is only possible to pretend otherwise by assuming that Kierkegaard's last works represent an almost pathological decline in his powers. Professor Haecker, who is a Catholic, makes that assumption; Professor Swenson, who might be a Unitarian from the way he quotes Emerson, vigorously protests against it. But Kierkegaard remains, profound, enigmatic, endlessly significant. He himself wrote his own epitaph:

"The cause he served was Christianity, and his life was from childhood wonderfully adapted to this end. He succeeded in realizing the reflective task of translating Christianity whole and entire into terms of reflection. The purity of his heart was to have had but a single aim."

# Indian Art

## 52. *Indian Art*

ART is a language, and though we may at first need the symbols of our written language to initiate us into its secrets, essentially it is a language with its own symbols, and it cannot be properly understood unless we learn to read these symbols directly, with our eyes.

No one who has studied medieval Christian imagery is likely to underestimate its complexity or its spiritual significance. But Indian art involves us in a world of thought which is at once more subtle and more consistent. The general student of art may quail a little at the first impact of something so vast and so strange. He has absorbed the art of the Far East, but that had a superficial charm which could be assimilated even if its deeper significance was ignored. But the art of India admits no such compromise. It is firmly based in life—in a very sensuous fullness of life ; but it transcends life. It is never, in our sense of the word, merely naturalistic. The curve of a dancer's body, however appealing in its naturalness and sensual grace, proves to be a pre-ordained posture, of spiritual significance. The art we call humanistic, restricted to the expression of individualistic feelings and concepts, must seem almost meaningless to the Indian artist. For him, what is human is fragmentary, and the perceptions of our senses only touch the surface of reality. Those senses, and all they can express in plastic form and bodily movement, are but the instruments by means of which we can piece together our fragmentary perceptions and so construct a picture of that fuller reality which underlies them. But the greatness and the uniqueness of Indian art lies precisely in the fact that, however purposive and transcendental it may become, it still strives to retain its æsthetic virtue, which is sensuous and personal. The

## A Coat of Many Colours

symbol is everywhere, exuberant and sometimes exasperating, but never intellectual and dead.

When art becomes consciously symbolical, as it did in Christian art, and in Indian art, it begins to decay. The trouble about the intelligence is that it is "overweening"; it considers itself self-sufficient, and assumes that its own instruments or reasoning are effective in communication. But in fact they are not so effective as the instruments of sensation. It is all very well to dismiss sensation as "an animal property" and to exalt knowledge as "distinctly human", and therefore to conclude that art, "as a department of the 'higher things of life', must have much more to do with knowledge than with feeling".<sup>1</sup> But man is also an animal, and "the higher things of life" have not suddenly intruded into the process of evolution, but have come as a progressive refinement of sensation and feeling. And these faculties still remain the test of reality, in art as in human relations.

To accept the view that the purpose of art is "primarily to communicate a gnosis" is to acquiesce in a petrification of life—the supersession of human relations by abstract doctrines.\* It may be arguable whether human relations need such a stiffening, but there is no doubt that art dies if confined to intellectual purposes. The purpose of art is to communicate, we agree, but not primarily to communicate a gnosis, or any other conceptual entity. The purpose of art is to communicate . . . let us leave it at that. The art is in the power to communicate, and this power depends without any doubt on the vitality of the senses which are used by the artist in the process of giving form to anything—be it a religious symbol or a chair to sit on, a poem or an aeroplane.

<sup>1</sup> These expressions come from an essay by Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy: "Why Exhibit Works of Art?"

## Architect's Place in a Modern Society

### 53. *The Architect's Place in a Modern Society*

THE architect has always had a specific place and purpose in society—he has always been the person who has tried to bring order into the otherwise unco-ordinated building activities of the human race. What I think we have to ask to-day is whether the particular circumstances of our period have imposed a special duty on the architect.

Behind us is more than a century of architectural chaos. It is partly a chaos that just happened—the débris of the industrial revolution. But it is also to a great extent a chaos made by architects—made by architects without any creative instinct who in their impotency could only turn to the past and imitate any style that pleased their momentary fancy. The past is not to be despised, and a great new style has sometimes been formed by an intelligent study and adaptation of a former tradition. But that was only possible so long as the needs of society remained more or less constant. The fifteenth century A.D. could imitate the fifth century B.C. because the intervening two thousand years had not changed the economic basis of society in any fundamental sense. Men were still living in small cities and dependent on handicraft. But the inventions of the last two centuries have completely changed the mode of human existence. About the only feature that has survived is the family, and round this unit the architect can still build a house that need not fundamentally differ from the house of a Greek family, provided that house is in a small town or the country. But everything else has changed. Power and transport have revolutionized industry; new and more efficient materials have been invented, and new methods of building free the architect from old restrictions. The architect of to-day is therefore

## A Coat of Many Colours

faced with a totally new problem. He has new materials and new power, and with these he has to create a new style, not merely as an æsthetic fancy, but as a practical necessity. I do not, of course, imply that the æsthetic element is unnecessary, or can be postponed. On the contrary, a style is not a style until it has its beauty. But the beauty is born of the necessity ; it is not an arbitrary choice ; it is rather the exact solution of a problem. When the problem is solved, then the architect may begin to express his free-will or his personality. A work of art, like an individual, is a variation of a natural order : it is never a creation in the void. The architect's place and purpose in modern society is nothing less than the discovery of fundamental laws upon which a later generation can safely base its diversions.

### 54. *D. H. Lawrence*

A LITERARY career whose productive period lies between the years 1912 and 1930 belongs to a clearly defined generation—specifically known as “ the war generation ”. Though, as many of his letters show, Lawrence felt the war far more acutely than most of the people who actually took part in it, he yet remained curiously unlike those who had fought—unlike Wilfred Owen, for example, and unlike his “ Arabian ” namesake. For the main effect of war was to drive the poet to silence, or to a dry laconic utterance. Whereas “ volubility ” would not be too strong a word to describe Lawrence's flow of expression—a button-holing, nagging prolixity of style which is his most serious fault.

So much admitted, we can praise Lawrence with a better conscience. For now we can see that of all his generation Lawrence had the greatest genius and the most prophetic knowledge. I believe that because of these

## D. H. Lawrence

qualities he has had the greatest influence on the younger generation—an influence which by now has passed far beyond the intellectual circles of London, Cambridge and Oxford and is actually a ferment within the national consciousness, and beyond these shores, in America, France and Germany. Though Lawrence was not the kind of man who is aware either of his masters or his disciples, we can interpret him as the poet-philosopher of a movement which includes, as intellectual counterparts, William James, Bergson and Freud. It is essentially a movement of liberation—liberation from dogma, from static conceptions of life, from unwholesome repressions of instinct. On its positive side, it is not a doctrine which Lawrence preached with any particular regard for consistency or completeness. Perhaps he should not have preached a doctrine at all, for what it all amounts to, in his case, is magnificent self-justification: the self-justification of a poet who knows that poetry is only possible under certain conditions, conditions of the personality and of society, conditions which the whole course of modern civilization has tended to deny.

"The imagination", Lawrence once wrote, "is that form of complete consciousness in which predominates the intuitive awareness of forms, images, the *physical* awareness." He was generalizing from his own experience; rightly generalizing, in my opinion. But it was his *poetic* experience, and the whole question is how, and in what degree, we can pass from poetic experience to what we may call a philosophy of life. "Whatever makes life vivid and delightful is the heavenly bread. And the earthly bread must come as a by-product of the heavenly bread. The vast mass will never understand this. Yet it is the essential truth of Christianity, and of life itself. The few will understand, let them take the responsibility." The few who understand are the poets. They alone have the physical

## A Coat of Many Colours

awareness, the tenderness of nerve, the discriminating sensibility. Lawrence had this awareness, in every fibre, and that is the secret of his greatness. But it is the greatness of a poet, and the poet only *states*; the rest is deduction, philosophizing, a clouding of the pure vision. Not that the awareness is confined to objective things; it is equally an awareness of subjective feelings, atmospheres. Nothing is more startling than the dead accuracy of Lawrence's awareness of what was going to happen in Germany, in Europe, years after his death.

One aspect of Lawrence tends to be forgotten: the technique of his poetry, which is integral with its quality. In the preface to an American edition of *New Poems* (1920) he wrote: "One realm we have never conquered: the pure present. One great mystery of time is *terra incognita* to us: the instant. The most superb mystery we have hardly recognized: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self. Poetry gave us the clue: free verse." Lawrence wrote much else, in that essay and elsewhere, in defence of free verse. It is inseparable, not only from his attitude to art, but inseparable from his whole philosophy. There seems now to be a tendency to return to deliberation, attitudinizing, the whole bagful of metrical monkey-tricks. Those who partake in this reaction should realize that they have separated themselves entirely from what is essential in Lawrence.

### 55. *Modern Chinese Painting*

A TRADITION may be good or bad and is not to be valued merely for its age; but a tradition that has survived the vicissitudes of thirteen centuries is likely to possess some principle of vitality unknown to the short-term policies of

## Modern Chinese Painting

European art. No one is likely to claim that the contemporary school in China can produce paintings to compare with the great masterpiece of the T'ang and Sung epochs ; but contemporary painters like Liu Hai-su and Wang Chi-Chih are literally born to the manner, and without any conscious affectation or sophistication (such as would distinguish a modern English painter who painted in the manner of Giotto) paint freshly and vividly in a tradition whose canons were fixed long before Giotto's time.

That tradition is partly technical, partly philosophical. But the philosophical aspect is the primary one, the technical one being fixed because it is best adapted to express the philosophical aim. Of the historical development of Chinese painting it is perhaps sufficient to say that in spite of the great division in Chinese thought between Confucianism and Taoism, Chinese painting was able to maintain its unity. This was due to a certain measure of pantheism common to both philosophies, but more particularly to the early recognition that what mattered in art was not the philosophy so much as the individual interpretation of it. Chinese art is uncompromisingly personal, individualist ; and its great tradition, and the secret of its long survival, is due to this fact. The traditions that die are the impersonal abstractions that have no roots in the self, and in the eternal need of the self to be objectified. Chinese painting is a technique for self-expression ; by keeping to this standard of self-expression, it bases itself on the eternal verities of the human mind and sensibility, which through all the stress of religions and philosophies, remain in direct communication with the physical phenomena of the world.

But to the Chinese those phenomena are not disconnected and discordant events ; they are part of a universal harmony ; and the peculiarity of the artist, distinguishing him from other men, is due to his perception of that



## A Coat of Many Colours

universal harmony. A modern Chinese scholar has observed :

Without distinction of schools, Chinese painting is concerned with that rhythmic harmony without which life would not be life. It is with this in view that Hsieh Ho (second half of the fifth century, A.D.) in his "Six Component Parts of Painting" names *Chi yung*, *Shen tung* (literally the combination "rhythmic harmony-life's motion") the primary condition to be observed. Chinese critics, in spite of differences of opinion and divisions into schools, unite in the belief that the painter must before all else concern himself with this combination of rhythmic harmony and vitality.

There is the implication that the painter, in order to express this quality of universal harmony, must in himself acquire a special state of grace, a nobility of spirit or depth of feeling. But one of the great artists of the Ming epoch, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, said with perhaps obvious truth that no one was likely to gain such a state of grace, even if he read ten thousand books and ranged over ten thousand leagues ; the artist is born, not made.

This sense of the harmony of the universe, which is the special possession of the artist, is best expressed, according to Chinese æsthetics, with the most limited means. The Chinese artist does not ask for a variety of colours and textures ; he is content with ink, one colour, in all its infinite tones, and a brush, that most sensitive instrument for registering the sensibility of the individual touch. With that same instrument the Chinese have for centuries written their complicated characters, and to handle a brush is for them as natural as writing with a pen is with us. Chinese painting is literally an extension of their handwriting ; written characters are an integral part of the composition. To the Chinese connoisseur, there is no division between the "written" and the "painted" parts of a picture ; all are equally an expression of the painter ;

## Modern Chinese Painting

and the painter is a sensitive recorder of the rhythmic harmony of the universe.

It follows that the subject of a Chinese painting is of little importance ; it is merely a point of departure, like a key in music ; and one looks in a Chinese painting for qualities analogous to those in music—varieties of stroke and touch correspond to beauty of tone and phrasing. But though the subject is relatively important, Chinese painters have inevitably tended to be above all landscape painters, or painters of natural objects like flowers and trees. For in such objects the rhythm and harmony of life is most freely embodied, is most accessible. In things made by human hand, in the habits and habiliments of men, there is an arbitrary quality, determined by function and intellect, overriding the universal rhythm and harmony. Art must be as free as Nature herself.

For these reasons we should approach Chinese art with great humility, recognizing that it is something less trivial than most of our Western preoccupations. It is true that Western art in its great moments is at once transcendental and monumental ; and Chinese art is never monumental. But the monumental tends to be immovable and finally oppressive, and one of the secrets of Chinese art is that in spite of its universality it is always miniature ; a key to the illimitable but never a Colossus.

### 56. *Walter Bagehot*

WALTER BAGEHOT is an eminent Victorian whose works, though they belong to a class which seldom survives its own age, show an obstinate vitality. This is partly due to his style, which has none of the deadly pompousness which afflicted so many of his contemporaries ; and partly to his matter, which has retained an interest for a variety of

## A Coat of Many Colours

intelligent readers. Bagehot was such a clear and precise writer that there is no occasion for exegesis. When it is necessary to draw the threads together and state "the ultimate logic and meaning of Bagehot's literary theory", it seems at first sight to be something rather thin and unexciting :

In surveying as a whole Bagehot's theoretical ideas on literature and criticism, one is struck with their coherence. One is surprised that what are for the most part disjointed and occasional remarks, dropped in the course of a criticism, should, at least in broad outline, hang so well together. The basis of this consistency, as of all other consistency in Bagehot, lies ultimately in the concept of the moderate and many-sided man. . . . The best literature should be broad in its contact with life, moral and serious in its thought and tone, noble and restrained in its style, because the moderate and many-sided man, as a reader and critic, prefers such literature, and because, as an author he produces it.<sup>1</sup>

This is an American critic's just summary of Bagehot's point of view in literary criticism, but it is just precisely because it recognizes that this concept of the moderate and many-sided man lies at the centre of all Bagehot's thought, that it represents a philosophy which Bagehot applied consistently to all aspects of life.

The present circumstances may be regarded as a sufficient excuse for turning to these wider aspects of Bagehot's philosophy, for they have an application to the problems of international politics. As a young man of twenty-six, Bagehot had visited Paris immediately after the *coup d'état* of 1851, and he wrote for the *Inquirer* a series of letters which immediately established his literary reputation. These letters, though not entirely consistent, were in effect a defence of the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon and an attack on democracy. But Bagehot, who was always to

<sup>1</sup> *Walter Bagehot*, by William Irvine. London (Longmans), 1939.

## Walter Bagehot

maintain that politics is a piece of business for which no universal laws were possible, was ready to admit that the fault lay, not with democracy as such, but with its application to a particular people, the French.

If you have to deal with a *mobile*, a clever, a versatile, an intellectual, a dogmatic nation, inevitably, and by necessary consequence, you will have conflicting systems, every man speaking his own words, and always giving his own suffrage to what seems good in his own eyes—many holding to-day what they will regret to-morrow—a crowd of crotchety theories and a heavy percentage of philosophical nonsense—a great opportunity for subtle stratagem and intriguing selfishness—a miserable division among the friends of tranquillity, and a great power thrown into the hands of those who, though often with the very best intentions, are practically, and in matter of fact, opposed to society and civilization.

This is already sufficiently like the criticisms brought against democracy by apologists of the totalitarian state, but Bagehot goes on in almost their very words :

And, moreover, besides minor inconveniences and lesser hardships, you will indisputably have periodically—say three or four times in fifty years—a great crisis ; the public mind much excited, the people in the streets swaying to and fro with the breath of every breeze, the discontented *ouvriers* meeting in a hundred knots, discussing their real sufferings and their imagined grievances ; with lean features and angry gesticulations ; the Parliament, all the while in permanence, very ably and eloquently expounding the whole subject, one man proposing this scheme, and another that ; the opposition expecting to oust the Ministers and ride in on the popular commotion ; the Ministers fearing to take the odium of severe or adequate repressive measures, lest they should lose their salary, their places and their majority ; finally, a great crash, a disgusted people, overwhelmed by revolutionary violence, or seeking a precarious, a pernicious, but after all a precious protection from the bayonets of military despotism.

## A Coat of Many Colours

Such a sentence is a very compendious summary of the vices inherent in democratic government ; and many people since Bagehot's day have thought as he did, that a personal dictatorship, however unscrupulous, is much to be preferred. He was not even then unaware of the disadvantages of dictatorship, and by 1865, in an essay of "Cæsarism as it now exists", he had become sharply critical. He had seen that the enforced calm of a despotism is opportunist—that it makes no provision for the future, and that by stifling discussion it inhibits progress. Worse still, it involves the corruption of the present. It imposes a greater burden on human nature than human nature will bear ; an Empire, in such circumstances, becomes merely an efficient immorality.

Turning to his own country, Bagehot saw that democracy did not entail the same disadvantages as in France, and in seeking for the reason he hit upon a paradox which he was to play with all his life. "I fear you will laugh", he writes in the third Letter, "when I tell you what I conceive to be about the most essential mental quality for a free people, whose liberty is to be progressive, permanent, and on a large scale ; it is much *stupidity*." He then defines this quality :

What we opprobriously call stupidity, though not an enlivening quality in common society, is Nature's favourite resource for preserving steadiness of conduct and consistency of opinion. It enforces concentration ; people who learn slowly, learn only what they must. The best security for people's doing their duty is, that they should not know anything else to do ; the best security for fixedness of opinion is, that people should be incapable of comprehending what is to be said on the other side.

But it must not be supposed that this quality was desirable in the people only ; Bagehot would not have cleverness in

## Walter Bagehot

politics at any level. His ideal statesman was Sir Robert Peel.

These youthful notions of Bagehot's are still present in his maturest political writings, notably in *Physics and Politics*, which he began to write in 1867. This is one of the pioneer works on a subject we now call sociology, and is described in the sub-title as "Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society". Though it is largely based on the ideas of Darwin and Sir Henry Maine, this book develops several of Bagehot's original ideas, and is still worth reading, especially at the present moment. He no longer uses the paradoxical term "stupidity", but that first brilliant observation is still latent in his mind. He notes, for example, that "long ages of dreary monotony are the first facts in the history of human communities, but those ages were not lost to mankind, for it was then that was formed the comparatively gentle and guidable thing which we now call human nature". But the corresponding political virtue is now called "animated moderation", a certain combination of energy of mind and balance of mind. It is a quality in which the English excel all other nations, and which has enabled them to make a success of democratic government. But to understand the significance of this quality in politics, we must refer very briefly to Bagehot's general theory of social evolution.

He distinguishes a preliminary age of isolation, a period of confusion and disorder, during which, in ways which are much clearer to us now than they were to Bagehot, groups and communities came into existence. Within these communities self-protective devices are gradually developed, "the cake of custom", social discipline and a system of religious sanctions. Natural selection operates through conflict. Civilization begins, because civilization is a military advantage. Law, morality, religion, the arts

## A Coat of Many Colours

and sciences tend to develop because they make for a better war machine. In due course a nation is formed, and then conservatism becomes the aim and principle of its existence. The youthful Bagehot had concluded that despotism was the only safeguard of a mature society, but he now sees that "it tends to keep men in the customary stage of civilization ; its very fitness for that age unfits it for the next. It prevents men from passing into the first age of progress". A new principle is needed—the principle of variability. If any further progress is to be possible, the intelligence which has hitherto been directed to war must be employed in discussion.

The beginning of civilization is marked by an intense legality ; that legality is the very condition of its existence, the bond which ties it together ; but that legality—that tendency to impose a settled customary yoke upon all men and all actions—if it goes on, kills out the variability implanted by nature, and makes different men and different ages fac-similes of other men and other ages, as we see them so often. Progress is only possible in those happy cases where the force of legality has gone far enough to bind the nation together, but not far enough to kill out all varieties and destroy nature's perpetual tendency to change.

The application of these ideas to the present situation in Europe is obvious enough. The one problem which we could wish Bagehot had discussed is not only our own particular problem, but also one which recurs throughout the history of the world—the co-existence of civilizations at different stages of social development. It is unfortunately not true that the most highly developed society is also the one most skilled in warfare ; at least, it is difficult to carry on an age of discussion in one corner of the world whilst an age of conflict is threatening you from another corner. But Bagehot's final conclusion is heartening :

Liberty is the strengthening and developing power—

## The Triumph of Picasso

the light and heat of political nature ; and when some " Cæsarism " exhibits as it sometimes will an originality of mind, it is only because it has managed to make its own the products of past free times or neighbouring free countries ; and even that originality is only brief and frail, and after a little while, when tested by a generation or two, in time of need it falls away.

In another place in this same book, *Physics and Politics*, Bagehot has been discussing the military advantage of moral virtue (Carlyle's God-fearing armies) and uses a phrase which describes the mood in which free men will always oppose Cæsarism in any shape or form. " That high concentration of steady feeling ", he says, " makes men dare everything and do anything."

### 57. *The Triumph of Picasso*

WE can imagine an actual triumph : the streets adorned with garlands, everyone in carnival dress, shouts of *Io triumphe !* At the head of the procession, instead of a senate, we might place the dealers—Messieurs Vollard and Kahnweiler, the brothers Rosenberg, Pierre Colle and Pierre Loeb, Mr. Zwemmer and Mr. Mayor. Instead of the trumpeters would come the critics, led by Monsieur Zervos, the authors of the twenty books on Picasso, the writers of the hundred essays on Picasso. For trophies there would be paintings, statues and models by the thousands of imitators of Picasso. Prominent among the victims destined for sacrifice would be a living representation of Venus, and the prisoners would, of course, include all the members of the Royal Academy and the Académie Française. Picasso's chariot might still be drawn by the traditional four bulls ; laurels would sit well on his head, but instead of a sceptre he would hold a brush in his hand, and his palette would be held by a moneylender to remind



## A Coat of Many Colours

him in the midst of his glory that he was a mortal man. He would be followed by an international army of admirers, and after the feast there would be a bull-fight for Picasso to paint.

Picasso is triumphant and prolific. Not content with painting and all the graphic means of expressing himself, he turned a few years ago to sculpture ; and more surprisingly, he has ventured into literary expression with a series of poems in Spanish and French. It is not the kind of poetry to be insulted with a few irreverently casual remarks ; I am willing, with André Breton, to believe that it has the same kind of significance as Picasso's painting, presenting, in lyrical images, that same synthesis of the real and the unreal, of the fabulous and the true. Here it is merely to be mentioned as one more manifestation of a genius too violent to be constrained within the categories of one art. Picasso has passed beyond the extremes of any previously-known romanticism ; more and more he has tended to fuse, not only all the elements of plastic expression, but everything material and immaterial—spirit and matter, myth and science, the dream and the reality. After exploiting abstract art, the pure tectonics of form and colour, he moved to the opposite pole and created *surréalisme*, a form of art that denies " art ", that seeks only the naked heart, the unknown, the uncreated, the dreaded Minotaur in the dark labyrinth of the unconscious mind.

In the whole career of an artist like Picasso there is an avoidance of any fixity of aim, of any rigid adherence to laws and precepts determined by the conscience or the intellect. " Pour mon malheur et pour ma joie peut-être, je place les choses selon mes amours ", he has declared. In other words, he works emotionally, instinctively, and not in accordance with a rational programme. His faith is, that what he creates out of love, and with passion, will be found beautiful—or if that is a tarnished word, acceptable. It is

## The Triumph of Picasso

a dangerous creed, opening the realm of art to all kinds of charlatans, who can claim that their confusion is inspiration, their chaos a unity worthy of our consideration. But I do not know whether more charlatans can shelter under such a doctrine than gather under the classical porticos of academic competence. Mediocrity is no more tolerable for being tidy.

In 1936 some of Picasso's sayings were recorded by Christian Zervos in *Cahiers d'Art*, and one of these reveals, not only the cause of his quarrel with abstract art, but also the clue to the unfailing vitality of all his paintings, even those which seem most abstract :

There is no abstract art. We must always begin with something. Afterwards we can remove all appearance of reality ; there is no danger because the idea of the object has left its indelible imprint. It was the object which provoked the artist, excited his ideas, stirred his emotions. Ideals and emotions will be securely imprisoned in his work ; whatever they do, they can't escape from the picture ; they form an integral part of it, even when their presence is no longer discernible. Whether he likes it or not, man is an instrument of nature ; she imposes her character and appearance on him. . . . We cannot contradict nature. She is stronger than the strongest of men. It pays us to be on good terms with her. We can allow ourselves some liberties, but only in the details.

Perhaps there are some terms in such a statement against which we might enter a logical or philosophical protest—though we must remember that it is only reported conversation that we are considering, not a clause in a manifesto. I always suspect any appeal to “ nature ”—that Mother, red in tooth and claw, who is invoked to justify most of the crimes of humanity. But Picasso's general meaning is clear. He wishes to warn us against the sterilizing influence of the intellect, which in its search for an ideal perfection sacrifices everything to precision and exactitude and

## A Coat of Many Colours

finds itself left with a static corpse instead of a living organism. The intellectuals might well reply that the perfection they seek is of an absolute and universal nature, and what is absolute and universal may have sacrificed the pulsing actuality of organic life, but only in exchange for a life more beautiful and more enduring.

These two ideals would seem to be irreconcilable, and certainly, if we are to compare the latest works of Picasso with the work of an abstract artist like Mondrian, it would seem that modern art has now split into two independent streams and that each will follow its own course henceforth. But actually history does not allow such independence for long ; sooner or later the social and economic conditions within whose framework art, like any other human activity, takes its shape, will bring art into unison. It is possible that the will to abstraction will find an outlet in some less obvious and less doctrinaire way—in architecture, for example. It is possible, too, that Picasso's latest development is prophetic, and that poetry will prove to be the most appropriate medium for the expression of a super-realistic vision. The only alternative is that some synthesis should be found which will reconcile intellectual idealism and emotional surrealism. Picasso himself rarely dispenses with every formal or intellectual element in his pictures ; nor, for that matter, does a surrealist sculptor like Henry Moore ; their most powerful creations are perhaps just those in which the extremes meet in some kind of tension or equilibrium. It is probably too difficult a position for any artist to maintain consistently ; but in art, if we ask for impossible perfection, we are likely to get an Alberti instead of a Leonardo, a Ben Jonson instead of a Shakespeare, an Alma-Tadema instead of a Cézanne—or, more likely still, complete sterility.

## International Situation in Fiction

### 58. *The International Situation in American Fiction*

FROM the beginning there has been what is vulgarly known as a snag. We speak of "American" literature; this note deals with the "American" novel. But in what sense American? In almost every other case,<sup>1</sup> when we speak of the literature of a country, we identify that country and its language; so profound is this sense of identity, that the only stable foundation for political boundaries is based on the linguistic test. But the language of American literature is English, and the question follows; to what extent can American literature be distinguished from English literature? Or, to put the question in a more acute form, to what extent can the American writer create an American tradition?

Every great American writer has been conscious of this problem, to a degree not often realized by the English reader. Perhaps, as a general rule, the American is more conscious of his difference. The average Englishman to-day hardly makes any distinction between any of the English-speaking peoples; they come from vast countries over the seas, they speak his language with an accent which is different, in kind but not in degree, from the accent of a Yorkshireman or a Scotsman, but they are definitely "one of us" as opposed to the Frenchman or the German. No doubt the Englishman makes a serious mistake, but I am sure that this is the general attitude of those who have never been to the United States or any of the Dominions. The American, on the other hand, is very conscious of all manner of differences—differences due to the variety of

<sup>1</sup> A parallel situation may be said to exist for Austrian, or Czechoslovakian literature, in so far as it makes use of the German language.

## A Coat of Many Colours

climate and custom, to a greater infusion of continental blood, and to the memory, perpetuated in literature and school-books, of bitter political quarrels in the past. As time passes, the first two differences are consolidated ; the third is happily disappearing. But to a representative American novelist of the last century such as Hawthorne, the sense of difference was primarily political. It appears most strongly in his *Journals*, and in that fascinating but neglected book of his, *Our Old Home* (first published in 1863). Here is a typical passage from the latter source :

An American is not very apt to love the English people, as a whole, on whatever length of acquaintance. I fancy that they would value our regard, and even reciprocate it in their ungracious way, if we could give it to them in spite of all rebuffs ; but they are beset by a curious and inevitable felicity, which compels them, as it were, to keep up what they seem to consider a wholesome bitterness of feeling between themselves and all other nationalities, especially that of America. They will never confess it ; nevertheless, it is as essential a tonic to them as their bitter ale.

Throughout the records of his English stay, as Henry James noted in his biography of Hawthorne, there appears this constant mistrust and suspicion of the society that surrounded him—"his exaggerated, painful, morbid national consciousness". Henry James regarded this as the weak side of Hawthorne's character (and showed 'no trace of the feeling himself') ; but it is important to realize that the first great American novelist wrote with this deliberate national assertiveness.

But with what result ? *Our Old Home* itself, the perfection of an *English* prose style, is one answer. The *style* of any of Hawthorne's books is an adequate answer, for that style is always English, the purest English, with the literary traditions of centuries to explain its transplanted bloom. Divorce Hawthorne from his style, and though he

## International Situation in Fiction

still remains a considerable novelist—a creator of character and a describer of scenes on the level, shall we say, of Charlotte Brontë—yet the result, as no dispassionate critic of Hawthorne could fail to admit, is a certain thinness, “subtle and slender and unpretending”, as James put it with his usual felicity. And the moral, added James, “is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion”.

It is only fair to add that thirty-five years later, in his *Notes of a Son and Brother*, James pointed rather a different moral. He had been discussing *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne's Roman novel, defending it against the contempt of another American cosmopolitan, suggesting that it

was all charged with a *tone*, a full and rare tone of prose. And the tone had been, in its beauty—for me at least—ever so appreciably American; which proved to what a use American matter could be put by an American hand: a consummation involving, it appeared, the happiest moral. For the moral was that an American could be an artist, one of the finest, without “going outside” about it, as I liked to say; quite in fact as if Hawthorne had become one just by being American *enough*, by the felicity of how the artist in him missed nothing, suspected nothing, that the ambient air didn't affect him as containing.

Perhaps the thirty-five years that had elapsed explain the discrepancy in these two “morals”; the American scene had become denser, richer; and Henry James, in his long and acute observation of his countrymen and their “situations”, had seen so many more facets, plumbed so many more depths, than in his youth had seemed possible. And meanwhile he himself had become the greatest illustration of our problem.

In jumping from Hawthorne to James, I do not think we

## A Coat of Many Colours

unduly simplify the problem we are discussing. Their cases are complex enough to include every shade of the American novelist's dilemma. It is true that there is the case of the complete expatriate of whom H. B. Brewster is a good example (he was the author of that considerable work, *The Prison*) ; and altogether the American seems to be peculiarly susceptible to cosmopolitanism—there are American "colonies" in scores of European cities. But does this aspect of the question denote anything more profound than the romantic view of life to be found in every country? A certain type of romantic American inevitably turns his eyes towards Europe, and if he can afford to indulge his romanticism, he will come to Europe, and finally settle there. But this is a very minor question ; it has no bearing on the major question, which transcends romanticism. And the answer to this major question, the solution of our problem, transcends the false ideology of nationalism.

It should already be obvious that the problem is really two problems, which have very little to do with each other. The first we might call cultural, the second linguistic. In the first place, the novelist's art, in all its temporal elements, in all that is not a question of form or style, depends strictly on his reaction to the society about him (differing in this respect from the romance, the work of fantasy) ; and the older, the richer, the denser that society is, the more subjects and situations it will offer for treatment. In this respect the relation of the American novelist to Europe only differs in degree from the relation of the provincial novelist in England to the culture of the metropolis. Provincial society has its own values, and American society has its own values, and great works of art can be the product of such values. But there will always be a centrality, an overtone, a tradition, towards which the fully conscious artist will aspire. In this sense (think of the case of

## International Situation in Fiction

Turgenev) the problem is not an American one; it is human.

The linguistic problem is even more definitely determined. Style is a function of language. The artist in language, whether in prose or poetry, is an individual possessing an exceptional sensitiveness to the sound and significance of words; he cannot create his style in relation to any other quality. Style has nothing to do with climate or condition, it is not the product of environment nor of economic forces. It is a central stream to which many writers contribute their personal idiosyncrasies (which nevertheless usually float like sticks and straws on the surface), but which no single writer deflects. The course of the stream is gradually modified by usage, and at some distant date it is possible that American usage may diverge so far from English usage as to produce a division in the stream; but that I doubt, for now English adapts itself to American idiom as quickly as American adapts itself to English idiom. I see no possibility of a distinct American style. Sometimes a writer claims a distinct American style—Bret Harte, O. Henry and their contemporary equivalents—but then it is usually a bad style. The style of the best American writers differs in no essential from the style of the best English writers.

There is a letter which Henry James wrote to his brother William in 1888 which gives a final expression to this truth; it has often been quoted, but I must give it once more:

For myself, at any rate, I am deadly weary of the whole "international" state of mind—so that I *ache*, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon me as a sort of virtue or obligation. I can't look at the English-American world, or feel about them, any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together that an insistence on their differences becomes more and more idle and pedantic;



## A Coat of Many Colours

and that melting together will come the faster the more one takes it for granted and treats the life of the two countries as continuous or more or less convertible, or at any rate as simply different chapters of the same general subject. Literature, fiction in particular, affords a magnificent arm for such taking for granted, and one may so do an excellent work with it. I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries), and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized.

That, it seems to me, must be the attitude of every mind not given to ignoble prejudices and narrow views. We English-speaking peoples cannot alienate our common culture; against its long historic continuity, the political differences of a century or two sink into insignificance. Precisely in the degree of their greatness our poets and novelists are at work preserving that continuity, binding together more firmly than ever the "big Anglo-Saxon total".

### 59. *Roger Fry*

THE set or coterie to which Roger Fry belonged was popularly supposed to have a local habitation in Bloomsbury, but it was nourished if not born at Cambridge and in reality it had an altogether wider ambience: it was (and is) a fairly common attitude to life. It was (the past tense is now inevitable) a cultured attitude; but its exponents would probably prefer the word "civilized". It was an *élite*—of birth no less than of education; its leading members were the sons and daughters of eminent Victorians, and they had passed through one or other of

## Roger Fry

our public schools. Cambridge gave them a scientific and inquiring temper. Historians, economists and philosophers belonged to this *élite* no less than writers and painters, and for that reason it could never be loosely identified with Bohemianism. But no less certainly it could never be identified with a true sense of reality. It turned with a shudder from the threatening advance of the proletarian "herd". Though it despised the moral pretensions and social prestige of the parent generation and hated the prevalent commercialism, it did not attempt to reconcile its own traditions of good taste and refinement with the necessary economic foundations of a new order of society. This was very obvious in Roger Fry's case : faced with the machine, mass-production and universal education, he could only retreat into the private world of his own sensibility. He did, more and more as time went on, attempt to find a universal philosophical justification for this private world, and he had at his command an ingenious mind and a patient experience of his subject. But all this effort did not bring him into any very vital or sympathetic relationship to his own age.

This came out very clearly in his only public venture—the Omega Workshops. This experiment was very nearly a success—a success, that is to say, with the small and snobbish public which can afford to buy individualistic art in a machine age. That it could not be more than this was evident in its early days to four of the most original artists whose services Fry had enlisted ; they revolted with perhaps unnecessary violence, but one passage in their manifesto expressed a truth which is still not obvious to anyone within the charmed circle :

The Idol is still Prettiness, with its mid-Victorian languish of the neck, and its skin of "greenery-yallery", despite the Post-What-Not fashionableness of its draperies. This family party of strayed and dissenting *Æsthetes*,

## A Coat of Many Colours

however, were compelled to call in as much modern talent as they could find, to do the rough and masculine work without which they knew their efforts would not rise above the level of a pleasant tea-party, or command more attention.

This brings us to the real problem of Roger Fry's life—a certain ambiguity which was due to his championship of Post-Impressionism. His sincerity has more than once been questioned, but usually by forthright reactionaries like Dr. MacColl, who could not understand why a man who knew so much about art could support such an abrupt break with tradition. Fry was quite capable of looking after himself in that quarter, but he was hurt and bewildered when the young men whom he had patronized turned against him. It would be absurd to suggest that Fry did not really appreciate artists like Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso ; he had an inborn æsthetic sensibility which could not play him false. But he had been converted rather late in life—he was over forty when he first began to appreciate the significance of Cézanne—and favourably as his mind might react to the art of Matisse and Picasso, he was never able to follow them in his own painting. He might try to penetrate the secret of Cézanne, not only by analysing him as he did in his book on the painter, but also by trying to repeat the old wizard's performance on canvas ; but it would never have occurred to him to jump forward, in front, not only of Cézanne, but even of Matisse and Picasso. Painters with much less talent have ventured more : but Fry's deepest instinct was not adventurous—his point of view being that " art as created by the artist is in violent revolt against the instinctive life, since it is an expression of the reflective and fully conscious life ", a point of view which is the antithesis of that expressed by Matisse and Picasso and the artists who have come after them.

The explanation of this ambiguity probably lies in the

## Roger Fry

traditions against which Roger Fry vainly revolted. The "snailhorn sensibility" which manifested itself while he was still an undergraduate at Cambridge was something that could not be denied: it made him give up a scientific career; it made him disappoint his eminent Quaker parents; it landed him in all sorts of financial and social difficulties; it gave him immense joy and stimulated him to endless intellectual research; but it could not prevail against the Inheritance—against the prettiness and the protectiveness of the Ivory Tower, against the benevolence of the Liberal outlook, against the intellect's pretensions to the final word. Roger Fry described himself as an artist, and most of all he would have liked to be remembered as a painter. But already during his lifetime the public, which often exercises a tyrannic control over an individual's development, decided otherwise; for one person who knew Fry as a painter there were probably hundreds who knew him as a critic. Nevertheless, most of his life was devoted to the canvas. He was nearly forty when his first books appeared—his monograph on Giovanni Bellini and his edition of Reynolds's *Discourses*—and after that there was a gap of fifteen years before *Vision and Design* was published in 1920. But that book and its successor *Transformations* (1926), were actually the products of an intensive journalistic activity which began as far back as 1903 with the foundation of the *Burlington Magazine*, which periodical he nursed into success and remained its animating spirit until the day of his death. With the Post-Impressionist Exhibition of 1911, he entered upon a more polemical phase, and his defence of the new school whose work he had introduced into England brought him into contact with a wider public. Doubtless because he had been trained as a scientist, there was a novel scientific approach in his art criticism—something drastically different from the vague emotional appreciation which had served the pur-

## A Coat of Many Colours

pose for a century or more. Fry was the first critic in this country to use the method of formal analysis—at least, the first to make it a popular method of exposition, for Bernhard Berenson had long been practising his “constructive art criticism” for the benefit of a more exclusive circle. But Berenson remained in the region of scholarship, whilst Fry brought scholarship into the contemporary arena. There was nothing amateurish or egregious about his defence of the Post-Impressionists in general and of Cézanne in particular. The startled academicians had to reckon with an opponent who could beat them on their own ground; who had far more knowledge and real understanding of ancient art than they had, and who could reinforce his advocacy of modern art with impeccable analogies from the past. When they were compelled further to recognize his intimate acquaintance with the technique of painting, there was little they could do but impotently fume against him. He, on his part, took the lead calmly and modestly, and only regretted that these journalistic demands encroached so much on his painting.

As a painter he sadly recognized that he had been damned by faint praise, and he took positive joy in an occasional article which roughly abused him. The value of his painting is difficult to estimate; he never departed from the path marked out by his master Cézanne, and Cézanne, in that particular path, was not to be excelled. His patient exploration of formal values and colour harmonies gave the public an impression of relentless dullness, and in the mass his pictures were monotonous. But often, isolated in a private house, one comes across a canvas that asserts itself by its sureness and coherence, and then one discovers it is one of his paintings. “Of course,” one says, “he is such a good painter.” But that opinion is always privately expressed; it never gets published.

His book on Cézanne is certainly the masterpiece of his

## Roger Fry

criticism. It traces the stylistic evolution of the master's art with a closeness of attention and an analytical brilliance that has rarely been equalled. His essay on Matisse is not so searching, perhaps because there was not the same degree of personal sympathy ; but like the shorter essay, collected in *Vision and Design* and *Transformations*, it is at once subtle and persuasive. Fry was tireless in his search for an æsthetic basis for his criticism, and did not hesitate to throw over a pet theory if he found a better one. He was, as most critics of his generation, an "æsthete", not looking far beyond the self-consistent unity of the work of art itself, always sticking to his sensibility as the only reliable guide. He was enormously interested in the psychology of art, but hated anything in the nature of psychological art. For this reason he had great difficulty in appreciating German art of any period, and he simply loathed the more recent developments of Expressionism. Even the Latin equivalents—the art of Picasso and Braque, for example—he found difficult to accept, though he admitted that the French always had good manners of some sort. He was "amused" by the imagery of Dali, but the Surréalistes as a whole bored him.

It is monstrous that a man of his intelligence and perception should never have occupied an official post of distinction. His own university did him tardy justice by electing him to the Slade Professorship when he was already sixty-seven. But alas, it was too late for his influence to have much effect. When he died suddenly in 1934, his course of lectures was uncompleted. He had undertaken to give a complete survey of the history of art, and this had compelled him, not only to complete his knowledge of epochs which he had hitherto neglected, but also to try and bring his judgement of various kinds of art into some degree of unity or consistency. Actually he did not live to complete his survey ; he dealt with Egyptian, Meso-

## A Coat of Many Colours

potamian, Ægean, Negro, American, Chinese, Indian and Greek art, but a tragic accident robbed us of the rest.

Roger Fry was essentially an impressionistic critic—he relied, that is to say, on his immediate sensations in the presence of a work of art rather than on any preconceived ideas about the purpose of art. Nevertheless, after an inaugural lecture on “Art-History as an Academic Study”, he gave two lectures on theoretical aspects of art which are in effect an attempt to justify the impressionist attitude. In his augural lecture he had suggested that in the criticism of art “we must abandon all hope of making æsthetic judgements of universal validity”—a conclusion only too effectively illustrated by the history and present state of art criticism. But to make this admission does not mean that we must simply give up all attempts to introduce order into this untidy department of human thought; we might at least define the terms we use. This is what Fry did, to a limited extent, in these two lectures. He knew that in the course of his survey he was going to rely almost exclusively on two qualities, sensibility and vitality, and he wanted at the outset to make it clear to his audience exactly what he meant by these terms.

It was typical of Fry that he should have used, and given distinct definitions to, notions so closely related as sensibility and vitality. A more logical mind would have sought to isolate the common element in the two phenomena, or to have related them to a superior unity. It would, moreover, have related them to other elements which the work of art possesses, and thus have arrived at a systematic exposition of all the elements included in the work of art—in other words, a system of æsthetics. But Roger Fry would have shuddered at the very thought. For all his scientific method, he was really on the side of those who protest that though they don't know much about art, they know what they like when they see it. His

## Roger Fry

criticism of art is nothing but an extensive rationalization and justification of this unscientific attitude. Even these two quasi-scientific terms which he did admit, turn out, on examination, to be of an extreme psychological naïvety. Though he devotes a whole lecture to vitality, he confesses that he knows very little about this quality. "It seems to me very mysterious, and I find it very difficult to allege any explanations of why it occurs when it does, by what exact processes the artist gives the illusion; and yet further, I do not know quite what value we ought to attach to the quality, or what its relations are to other æsthetic qualities." In effect, it is something in the work of art which we detect by virtue of the other quality, sensibility, which he had defined in his previous lecture. If we then turn to his definition of this quality, we are again thrown back on something very obscure. It is a quality which the artist possesses and impresses on his work of art, and which can be communicated from the work of art to a suitably sensitive spectator. To illustrate what he means by the term, Fry compares a straight line drawn by a ruler with a straight line drawn by hand.

The ruled line is completely mechanical and as we say insensitive. Any line drawn by hand must exhibit some characteristics peculiar to the nervous mechanism which executed it. It is the graph of a gesture carried out by a human hand and directed by a brain, and this graph might theoretically reveal to us first, something about the artist's nervous control, and secondly, something of his habitual nervous condition, and finally, something about his state of mind at the moment the gesture was made.

Now though Fry gives several more elaborate illustrations of what he means, this simple one suffices to show the limitations of this standard of judgement.

What Roger Fry called "sensibility" should more exactly be called "sensitivity". If we use the wider



## A Coat of Many Colours

term sensibility, which would, as Fry later assumes, include sensibility towards the abstract relations of planes, masses and intervals, then we must claim that a ruled straight line may possess just as much sensibility of one kind as a line drawn by hand possesses of another kind. It is sensibility of the first kind which is exploited in so-called abstract art—a kind of art to which Fry, incidentally, was insensible. What Fry meant by sensibility was something much more limited. It was the idiosyncrasy which is evident in every personal gesture of an individual, and which is recorded exactly in such activities as writing with a pen or painting with a brush. It is that peculiarity of line or texture—generally an irregularity or nervousness—which is expressive of the nervous energy and indeed whole mentality of an individual human being.

If we think of our relations with other human beings, we must admit that they are rarely based on rational or even moral grounds. We may cultivate people we do not particularly like because they are or may be useful to us; and we have to put up with others because we are tied to them by business or marriage. But the people we genuinely like we like instinctively and irrationally; and if we analyse such relationships we find that they are based on subtle psychological accords and sympathies which are the peculiar possession of each individual. In human relationships everything is relative; in Roger Fry's aesthetics everything is relative. He liked or disliked works of art instinctively, and his great quality, the quality which made him an inspiring teacher and a fascinating companion, was his immense gusto. Though he was always willing if not eager to discuss theories, in his presence one willingly abrogated theory for the sake of enjoyment. His real art was the art of communicating sensuous pleasure. The very absence in him of a strong logical faculty left him free of those intellectual prejudices which interfere with the

## Roger Fry

æsthetic reactions of most people. He had his blind spots, which were not so much blind spots as black-outs. One was German art in general, and Dürer in particular ; another was Turner. Of the former prejudice there is an interesting example in one of his last lectures. Having recognized vitality as one of the essential qualities in a work of art, he was faced with the inescapable fact that German art, from the Gothic period down to the modern Expressionist movement, had possessed this quality in abundance. But Fry saw a way out of the dilemma ; they possessed it, he would say, not in abundance but in excess. But when it came to illustrating this point he was not very convincing. He contrasts, to the disadvantage of the German works, the Bamberg St. Elizabeth with Donatello's " Lo Zuccone ", Grünewald's " Crucifixion " with Castagno's ; but all his special pleading cannot alter what, for another critic, are the inescapable facts : that we are in the presence of four great works of art whose qualities should be reconcilable in any comprehensive theory of art.

### 60. *Raphael*

THE average man, asked to name a great painter, will automatically answer " Raphael ". Bernhard Berenson, the famous critic of Italian art, once said that it would take not one but ten thousand M. Tissots to win the populace away from the spell of Raphael. But Mr. Berenson was still living in the nineteenth century when he made that statement, and since then a considerable shift in public taste has taken place. The chromo of the Sistine " Madonna ", which then looked down so calmly and incongruously from the dining-room wall, has long since been relegated to the spare bedroom, or even to the attic. In normal times, some of the greatest of Raphael's

## A Coat of Many Colours

works, the so-called "Parthenon Sculptures of modern art", the Raphael Cartoons, are splendidly displayed in a special gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum: in spite of its easy accessibility, it is the most solitary spot in London, the solitude only occasionally disturbed by an industrious German traveller, *Baedeker* in hand, or more rarely by a party of noisy and unwilling school-children. It is too simple to explain this as but another example of our national indifference to art. It is true that the same gallery, if transferred to Berlin or Florence, would have more visitors, but only because the tourist traffic in these places is better organized. The real truth of the matter is that the average man of to-day is bored by Raphael—and not only by Raphael, but equally by Michelangelo, Titian and the whole of the classical tradition in art.

So much the worse for modern man, no doubt. But it is again too simple to ascribe this boredom or indifference to a decline in taste. The modern attitude is not a merely negative attitude. It is the expression of a positive preference for other types of art, and though a change of taste may still be a decline of taste, the superiority of the earlier standard must not be taken for granted. What ten thousand Tissots would not be able to achieve may nevertheless have been accomplished by but one Renoir or Van Gogh. Even though, by some absolute standard, we recognize the supreme nature of Raphael's genius, must we at the same time condemn as spurious the sensibility which prefers, in the place of honour formerly occupied by the Sistine "Madonna", Van Gogh's "Sunflowers"?

Even those who are most conscious of Raphael's sublimity are ready to admit the unfortunate nature of his influence on the development of painting: not merely are his immediate followers—Giulio Romano, Pierino del Vaga, Giovan Franceschi Penni, and the rest—dreary and banal

## Raphael

beyond endurance, but from the school of Raphael there descends directly that academicism in art education which has for three centuries been a blight on all creative activity, and which still survives in such "charnel-houses", as Berenson called them, as the *École des Beaux Arts* at Paris, not to mention similar institutions nearer home. Why sublimity should have such a shabby progeny is one of the mysteries of life—for sublime poets and prophets share the same fate as sublime painters. It is popularly supposed that Eastern craftsmen, in order to avoid any presumption to the perfection which belongs properly only to the divine, deliberately introduce a fault into their work : it is more likely that they are aware of the æsthetic value of an occasional discord. Would we now like Raphael's art rather more than we do if it had been less perfect, more "mannered"? There are elements in some of his late paintings—in the "Visitation" in the Prado at Madrid, for example—which suggest this possibility : a new colourism, as Professor Suida describes it, "which leaves far behind the rational naturalism of the fifteenth century and opens the path along which El Greco, Baroccio, and many other painters will wander". But at this point we must remember that Raphael died young : had he lived as long as Titian, for example, it is possible that what we have been taught to regard as the achieved classicism of his maturity would have the appearance of merely one phase in the restless progress of an experimental genius.

There is, however, one other justification for what I have described as a change of taste. Raphael was essentially a decorative artist. "Raphael's best doing", wrote Ruskin, "is merely the wall-colouring of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries." Ruskin did not say this in any derogatory spirit—rather "there is no existing highest-order art but is decorative" :

## A Coat of Many Colours

and the derogatory use of the word is merely a contemporary prejudice. But what the public—particularly the public which can only afford to buy reproductions—has become obscurely aware of during the past fifty years is a sense of decorative appropriateness. They realize that a painting whose sublimity fits it for its place in a church or a palace is distinctly out of place in a suburban drawing-room. They may even feel that, pickled and insulated in the artificial atmosphere of a modern museum, it loses much of its original significance. In such an atmosphere, Raphael's madonnas survive, not in virtue of their divinity, but of their very tender and sensuous humanity. Once that fact is admitted, it is but honest to admit that we prefer the more direct or unequivocal representation of these same qualities in a Renoir or Degas. But taste is the last stronghold of dissimulation, and we shall doubtless continue to pay tribute to virtues we do not desire to possess and to ideals we can never emulate.

### 61. *T. E. Hulme*

SEVERAL poets and philosophers of promise lost their lives in the last war, but it is doubtful if any one of them would have made so much difference to the intellectual life of his country as Hulme, who was killed at the age of thirty-four in 1917. I use the vague phrase "intellectual life" because I do not suggest that Hulme, who was a philosopher, would have created a new philosophical system. Though he was a brilliant thinker, he was not particularly original. He had an extraordinary sense for what was significant in other people's ideas, and though he was guided by one or two general principles, these were relatively simple and decidedly reactionary. It was Hulme's function to be an animator of thought and feeling—one of

## T. E. Hulme

those raiding corsairs of the intelligence who respect no boundaries and observe no rules. He has been compared to Pascal, and though at first sight that may seem too bold, it is Pascal's name which most frequently crops up in any discussion of Hulme. He was not only the same type of thinker; there is also a considerable similarity in their thought. Hulme himself declared in one place that his notes were to be regarded as prolegomena to the reading of Pascal.

One of my first tasks after the last war was to edit Hulme's essays and philosophical fragments and these were published under the title *Speculations* in 1924. The book made slow progress at first, but a new edition was called for in 1936, and has had a steady accession of readers. But the influence of a book of this sort is not to be judged by its sales; either directly or indirectly Hulme has affected the outlook of a generation.

Hulme recognized two orders of reality, the one divine, a hierarchy of absolute ethical values represented by religion; the other human, the world of our physical existence, inevitably limited, imperfect, and only saved from brutishness by some perception of the nature of the divine order. Hulme, like many philosophers before him, naturally drew the conclusion that if humanity is to enjoy any degree of civilization, it must be disciplined by an order or tradition established in accordance with the absolute ethical values. He was never, however, very precise as to the way in which this was to be done. He combined a belief in absolute values with a nominalism which would normally lead a philosopher to deny their existence. That is to say, though he might admit the existence of the values, he was equally convinced that it was impossible to define them, or rather, that any attempts to define them would necessarily be only "amplifications of man's appetites". There is an abyss between the human and divine, and we

## A Coat of Many Colours

can only bridge it with approximations—that is to say, with the intuitions of the poet and the mystic.

If we look at Hulme's dilemma a little closer, we find that one of its terms is equivocal. There can be no question about the first proposition—that man is inherently limited, a mixture of good and evil impulses, incapable of progress unless controlled. That proposition must either be accepted or rejected—it cannot be qualified. Hulme accepted it and based on it his destructive attacks on humanism. The second proposition, that man, on account of his inherent weakness, must submit to the authority of a religious tradition, he held with the same conviction but with less consistency. Tradition in art, the subject in which Hulme was chiefly interested, meant classicism. Hulme hastened to adopt classical art. Without putting too much strain on his natural preferences, he could exalt fancy at the expense of imagination, and a German art historian, Wilhelm Worringer, provided him with a distinction between geometric and organic form which enabled him to divide contemporary painting and sculpture along similar lines. War was declared against romanticism, and by defining romanticism as spilt religion and confusing it with sentimentality, he was able to manœuvre all his enemies into the same false position. But when he came to review his own forces he found not only Horace, Racine and the English Augustans on his side, but also Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. Nietzsche provided him with a phrase—dynamic classicism—to hide the discrepancy, but it was a palpable begging of the question. Actually, when he is discussing this weary question of romanticism and classicism, Hulme is apt to forget his fundamental distinction, which is philosophical, and lose himself among the secondary characteristics of æsthetic expression. That is to say, having decided on philosophical grounds that Horace, Racine and Shakespeare are accept-

## T. E. Hulme

able poets, he proceeds to lump their very diverse literary qualities together as classicism ; and having decided on the same grounds that Lamartine, Hugo and Swinburne are bad poets, he proceeds to call their qualities romantic. But it is doubtful if stylistic criteria have much to do with the question. The underlying distinction, which is never so consciously philosophical as Hulme would have it, is between two social attitudes—between those poets on the one hand who wish to devote their artistic talents to the conservation of existing social values, and those on the other hand who wish to devote them to the disruption of these values and to the establishment of new ones. A revolutionary poet will often introduce a revolutionary technique, but not necessarily so. The youthful and revolutionary Wordsworth revolted against an artificial poetic diction, but the equally youthful and revolutionary Swinburne restored it.

From the point of view of art, there is not something which we can call tradition : there are two traditions, the romantic tradition and the classical tradition, and the prevalence or urgency of one or the other at any particular time will depend on the distribution of social forces. The only conditions which would ensure a stable form of art, that is to say, a disappearance of the conflict between classical and romantic tendencies, would be a state embodying the principles of absolute justice. But to suppose that such a state can ever exist is to accept that very doctrine of human perfectibility against which Hulme brings his most destructive arguments.

This contradiction is inherent in every form of the traditionalist doctrine—even the religious. Unless a religion is based on mystical revelation, on an irrational authoritarianism which can in no sense be called “an act of the intellect”, the traditional dogmas of that religion can only be established and elaborated and sustained by



## A Coat of Many Colours

fallible human agents ; and that this human fallibility extends to such doctrinaire products of the mind is evident enough from the whole course of history. The choice, therefore, is not between humanism and an absolute ethical order free from human taint ; it is between a humanism that strives after a rational interpretation of the universe and a humanism that accepts an irrational dogma. And an irrational dogma can only survive as a tradition by virtue of an external authority. The life of reason, which also has every right to be called a tradition, is a life of change, of growth and decay ; but the stabilization of a human interpretation of ethical values, which is the only meaning we can give to a religious tradition of a rational kind, is an arbitrary act of the human will. Even if we believe with Kant that a moral sense is implicit in the nature of reason, we are still bound to the limitations of a human faculty. Michael Roberts, in his study of Hulme,<sup>1</sup> says finely that reason is not complete unless it includes humility, and that humility involves a recognition of tradition and authority. But reason also includes doubt—humility involves doubt ; and finally we may accept all Hulme's criticisms of humanism, romanticism and liberalism and still be no nearer the shelter of a Church. Between the feebleness of mankind and the perfection of the divine Hulme saw nothing but a tragic discord—a discord to be resolved by the fallible processes of human reason, or to be affirmed by an act of intuition—by the highest of all human modes of expression, the art of tragedy.

Hulme's predominant interest, as I have already said, was æsthetic. His work on Epstein, in which Epstein was a point of departure rather than an end, perished with him. The most detailed and coherent plan found among his notes was for a book on the theory of art. There is

<sup>1</sup> *T. E. Hulme*, by Michael Roberts. London (Faber & Faber), 1938.

## T. E. Hulme

little doubt that in the course of his development Hulme would have encountered Kierkegaard, and would have had to deal with that philosopher's contention that the æsthetic attitude can only lead to despair. If he had accepted that conclusion, the real problem would then have been to reconcile the æsthetic with the ethical attitude. Kierkegaard believed that they could only be reconciled in religion, but he could not reconcile his conception of religion with the tradition of the Established Church.

If we would secure the free assent of men we must appeal to them by myth rather than by precept—by art rather than by dogma. Perfect things teach hope, said Nietzsche. In the perfection of tragedy we transcend our fate. This realization of the tragic significance of life is the prerequisite of any measure of human greatness, but it is not specifically religious. Or if it is, the religion is in the ritual, in the drama, in the creation of the poet. To interchange tragedy and religion is to confuse what is perhaps the greatest of all issues. Between tragedy and religion the burden shifts. Redemption, which is inseparable from religion as understood in the Western world, introduces the idea of divine pity. Tragedy is not so humane; its catharsis is a healing process, but the most that it promises is serenity.

### 62. *Seurat's "La Baignade"*<sup>1</sup>

EVERY work of art contains two groups of elements. Let us call them the *universal* and the *incidental*.

In the universal group are all those elements of form, colour, material, and their interrelations, which appeal directly to the senses, or sensibility. It is because the sensibility of man may be regarded as constant in its range

<sup>1</sup> Contributed to a series entitled "What I like in Art".

## A Coat of Many Colours

(though not in its operation) that these elements can be called universal. The universal is the permanent, and for our present purpose we may regard the universal elements in art as simply those which persist. Some of them, such as colour, are very superficial in their appeal ; others are very profound, such as the formal configuration of planes and masses in sculpture and architecture.

In the incidental group are all those elements which appeal to the emotions and intellect—all those elements associated with words, symbols and ideas. We should include under this head the primitive magical significance of a savage mask, the higher religious significance of a Greek temple or a Byzantine church, or a painting by Giotto or Fra Angelico, and the intellectual significance of a painting by Leonardo or Poussin, the decorative significance of Tura or Braque—everything imported into a work of art by the use or purpose for which it is designed.

I begin by making this general distinction, because I believe that an awareness of its existence in any particular work of art is necessary for clarity of appreciation. We should ask ourselves what is the *æsthetic* value of the reasons we advance for our preference of any particular work of art. It is possible to say that only the universal elements are properly to be regarded as *æsthetic* ; this is the theory of pure art, or art for art's sake. From this point of view, the religious content of a painting by Giotto, or the ideological content of any picture whatsoever, is of no significance. But that is not the point of view generally adopted by critics of art, nor is it my own point of view.

I regard the ideological content (granted that this may be very abstract and intellectual, as well as religious or sentimental) as a normal ingredient in works of art. It is not the *subject* of Frith's "Derby Day" that disturbs me—it is its utter crudity as a composition in colour. I do not, however, always feel competent to appreciate the ideological

## Seurat's "La Baignade"

content of a work of art. I do not feel sure that I can put myself at the mental and emotional point of view of a Giotto or a Piero or a Michelangelo. That point of view, in the case of any artist, is a very complex construction, depending on a vast array of factors which I can only dimly reconstruct. I may get somewhere near to an appreciation of the religious conceptions of a Giotto—somewhere near ; perhaps a little nearer than to those of a fifth-century Greek or an African negro. But even assuming that I do so much, there are still numberless factors which I have not accounted for. There is the particular social atmosphere prevailing in Giotto's time ; and not only in his time, but in his country and town, his particular economic status and the general economic structure of the society of which he was a unit. There are simpler questions of climate and mode of life. There are very important details such as Giotto's relations to his predecessors and his followers ; the painter's professional status and the professional practices which he adopted ; even more technical questions such as the range and quality of materials available to him, the prevalent method of painting, the chemistry of the colours he used, the mode of lighting ; workshop organization, and in particular the importance attached during his lifetime to the painter's own handiwork—in other words, the part played by apprentices and assistants. There is the still more difficult question of arriving at some conception of what the picture looked like when Giotto had finished painting it. Very few old paintings have survived without repainting, and in every case their original colours are faded and their original surfaces decayed.

I may study these questions for many years and become a specialist on a particular period ; even then I should feel the presence of a veil of uncertainty and incomplete knowledge between myself and the painter. I am not and cannot be in possession of all the factors necessary for the full

## A Coat of Many Colours

appreciation of an "old master", or of any work of art distantly removed from me in time. Only in works of art contemporary with my experience of life do I feel fully aware of all their potentialities. Therefore I enjoy modern art above the art of all other periods.

It may be said that a 50 per cent. enjoyment of a work of art from one of the great periods is worth more than a 100 per cent. enjoyment of a contemporary work of art. That is a possible point of view, but I believe it depends on a deliberate suppression of real æsthetic enjoyment. Most connoisseurs, as they are rightly called, enjoy their art with deliberation and memory rather than with their immediate senses. They have been taught what to admire and know what they are expected to admire; they rarely make their own æsthetic discoveries; their intellectual caution breeds a sensual impotence.

For these reasons I have chosen a modern work to represent "what I like in art". In comparison with others who have contributed to this series, I am at a disadvantage, because the condition that the particular work of art chosen should be in a public gallery or well known from reproductions excludes nearly all my real preferences. It is true that a few contemporary paintings and pieces of sculpture have drifted into the Tate Gallery by accident rather than by design; but I do not find there a representative example of the best work of Picasso, Juan Gris, Léger, Miró, Kokoschka, Klee, or any of the modern artists whose work I particularly admire. It is a standing reproach to this country that it does nothing, or next to nothing, for contemporary art. It is true that there is a Chantrey Bequest which is supposed to be devoted to the purchase of modern works of art, but it is administered by officials completely out of touch with the modern spirit; there is also the Contemporary Art Society, which occasionally buys a work contemporary in spirit as well as in name, but its

## Seurat's "La Baignade"

general policy is timid and academic. New York, on the other hand, has now two public galleries entirely devoted to contemporary art—the Museum of Modern Art, and the Gallery of Living Art (the latter attached to the University).

The work of art which nevertheless I have chosen is a classic of the modern movement—"La Baignade", by Georges Seurat, which hangs in the Tate Gallery. Seurat, who was born in 1859, died at the early age of thirty-two in 1891; if he had lived I believe he might have been incomparably the greatest of modern painters—greater even than Cézanne. As it is, his work seems to gain in significance year by year; and the best elements in the painting of to-day are more nearly related to Seurat than to Cézanne. This picture, which is of considerable size (144½ inches by 71¾ inches), is entirely typical of his work. We must first note its almost regular geometrical organization. It is divided horizontally by an emphatically linear skyline, placed at exactly one-third of the depth of the canvas; a diagonal crosses from the top left corner and meets the bottom of the frame one-tenth of the way along; an exactly corresponding diagonal crosses from right to left through the shoulder of the largest bather and at right-angles to the axis of the body of the man in the bowler hat, emerging through the near paw of the dog and meeting the frame again at exactly one-tenth of the way along. A great number of other geometrical correspondences exist; one suspects them in the dimensions and intervals of the factory chimneys on the skyline; in the distances separating the various heads; in the triangles formed by lines joining these heads, above all in the perspective recession of the various figures and groups. Corresponding motives are the curves of the backs of several figures, the curves of the sails, the curves of hat-brims. The composition is further knit together by various lateral motives, such as the shadows on the grass, the weeds in the river, and the distant punt.

## A Coat of Many Colours

The colour scheme is correspondingly deliberate. In each compartment made by the diagonals, an equation is set up, which holds good for both sets of compartments. The dominant colours are blue and yellow, with red as a constant multiple. The paint is applied in small touches of pure colour, the method known as pointillism, but this method was an affectation of the period to which I do not attach particular importance. What is important in the picture is the fact that everything is meant, everything is mathematical. I do not imply that it is devoid of individuality, or of emotion; it is as personal, as *unique*, as the artist's handwriting. But there is no slopping-over of *irrelevant* emotion. The temporal elements are conscious and intellectual, and not, as is more usual, magical or sentimental; and that is my own personal preference in the plastic arts. I fully recognize the right of the artist to be emotive and expressionist, and have on other occasions explained such types of art to the best of my ability. But for the moment I am writing of my personal prejudices, and they are represented, as near as they can be in a work of art available to the public, by this painting of Seurat's. I find the same qualities in Juan Gris, in Fernand Léger, and in certain phases of Picasso's art.

It will be seen that a painting like this of Seurat's unites all those factors, both universal and incidental, that exist in a work of art; moreover, all these factors are completely available to an open and unprejudiced sensibility. Above all, I would insist on the incidental elements. "One must look at nature with the eyes of the mind and not merely with the eyes of the body, like beings without reason. . . . Reason is one of the most beautiful faculties of the human mind, and he who does not passionately seek to extend his knowledge by that fact alone renounces his greatest privilege." Seurat had pondered these words of a con-

## Stendhal

temporary scientist,<sup>1</sup> and found that they expressed his own ideal. It may be that a time will come when such an intellectual ideal in art will not be appreciated ; there are special reasons why intellectual values appeal to our generation. They are part of our *Zeitgeist*—that impalpable spirit of the times which is created by the air we breathe, the manner of our lives, our habits and adventures, our work and pleasure, our hopes and fears—all the spiritual and material factors of our mode of being. In “La Baignade” this spirit has been felt by the keen sensibility of a great artist and objectified in the colour and form of a great work of art.

### 63. *Stendhal*

READING for pleasure and reading for profit is a distinction which most people, presumably, can maintain all their lives, and if it is lost it is because reading becomes wholly a spare-time occupation. But the professional man of letters finds himself in a more pitiful condition ; all he reads must be grist to his mill and it is rarely that he can afford himself the time to read for no purpose at all beyond immediate enjoyment. That is not to say that he does not enjoy what he reads, but the virtue is in the necessity. Sometimes, however, time and circumstances leave him stranded. He picks up what is at hand, and reads idly, innocently, incontinently. In such a mood I recently found myself indulging—I was conscious of the moral aspect—in a recently published novel. There is no point in divulging its name, but it was a clever novel, by one of the most promising of our younger writers. I was absorbed, and finished the book before the long summer's day was

<sup>1</sup> The scientist in question was a certain David Sutter. For the evidence see *Georges Seurat*, by John Rewald. New York (Wittenborn), 1943.



## A Coat of Many Colours

over. I was very pleased, and promised myself to read more modern fiction. The experience had been vivid, and for the moment the characters in the book haunted me with their glittering presences. For the moment ! For the day being a long one, I turned in the evening to another book, a book I had read years ago and which I had often intended to re-read—Stendhal's *Journal*, which he called *Vie de Henri Brulard*. I had not read many of its not very exciting pages before I realized that the experience was totally different in kind from the experience of the earlier part of the day ; and that before the reality of this experience, the art of the novelist had collapsed like a pack of slippery cards.

Now Stendhal himself was a novelist, one of the greatest, and the difference between his *Journal* and any of his novels is not considerable ; his novels, that is to say, are largely transcriptions of his own experience, and his heroes are but various portraits of the artist as a young man. The modern novel I had read had been, on the other hand, what we would call objective ; the portrait of a cad with whom the author would in no sense wish to be identified. I then put the following questions to myself :

- (1) Does the attempt to be objective in fiction inevitably involve the author in shallow creations—in two-dimensional painting which lacks the subjective depth of truth ?
- (2) Is there a fundamental conflict between creation and observation ; between the imaginative and the scientific faculties ? That is to say, is self-observation the only creative kind of observation ?
- (3) Is there an order of fiction emancipated from observation and the naturalism it always implies ?

Questions which I did not answer to my own satisfaction, but questions which imply a profound discontent with the present standards of fiction.

## Stendhal

I noted as I read *Brulard* that it was exactly a hundred years since it was written. There are few centenaries better worth keeping—and to keep the centenary of a book it is only necessary to re-read it. In this journal Stendhal tried to give a completely honest portrait of himself. Admittedly a difficult thing to do, but often, it will be said, achieved by other writers. But never, I would retort, in quite the same way. Never with quite the same absence of distortion. The difficulty, when you look in a mirror, is not to adopt an attitude, an artificial alertness. The fault with those great self-confessors, Montaigne and Rousseau, is what Stendhal called "l'emphase"; the self is emphasized, accented, placed in a limelight which is not part of its natural outfit. The same fault is to be found in various modern confessions—in André Gide's, for example. Gide is aware of these subtleties of pose—aware, too, of his Stendhal; but it is always the photogenic face—the face of the man photographing himself. Even if the effect is that of a snapshot, we feel that the camera was first fixed in position, and that the author himself surreptitiously pulled the string.

The alternative, as Stendhal feared, is superficially dull. But personally I find myself fascinated by every detail of Stendhal's life of a man supremely intelligent, supremely human, and supremely honest in his writing. It is a unique combination.

In one of those model obituaries of himself which Stendhal thoughtfully provides for posterity, he sums up his taste in these words: "Il aime Cimarosa, Shakespeare, Mozart, le Corrège." That was written in 1821, and is a fair test of Stendhal's artistic discrimination. Our discrimination is no more absolute in 1935 than his was in 1821, but in at least two cases, Shakespeare and Mozart, time has marvelously confirmed his choice—a choice by no means inevitable a hundred years ago. As for Cimarosa, present musical fashions keep us in profound ignorance of his

## A Coat of Many Colours

work ; but the fact that Stendhal ranked his music with Mozart's is enough to make me suspect that our neglect is unjustified. But Correggio ? Correggio is by no means unappreciated to-day—not long ago he was one of the minor sensations of the Italian Exhibition in Paris ; and I dare prophesy that before another century has elapsed, this choice of Stendhal's will seem less eccentric. I mean, that not knowing El Greco, Correggio was almost the only choice possible for Stendhal.

“L'emphase”, the quality Stendhal disliked so much in literature, has one meaning in the original Greek, another in French, and still another in English. Stendhal meant what perhaps we should now call affectation. But taking the word in its normal English sense, as a stress placed on a word to make its particular significance evident, it might still be used as a test of style. Emphasis makes for good journalism and for bad literature. In good writing individual words need no particular emphasis : they convey their full force by their perfect syntax, by their place in the sentence and in the architecture of the paragraph. A writer with an emphatic style is just as objectionable as a man with a loud voice.

### 64. *Georges Rouault*

THE first thing that strikes us on entering a room in which Rouault's paintings are hung is that we are no longer in a private world. It is no more private than a medieval cathedral—to the decorative art of which it has direct resemblances. It may be that the derivation is too direct, and that Rouault has adopted the language of the Middle Ages because he could not find one of our own age. But the lesson nevertheless is there to learn. This is a public style, announcing important truths in unmistakable terms.

## Georges Rouault

Subtleties, intimate relationships, are subordinated to simplicity and economy and strength. The scale is infinite. Almost any one of these subjects could be enlarged to the size of a poster, a mural, a stained-glass window, and only gain by the process. I would like to see a Rouault exhibition brought into the midst, not of experienced amateurs, but of unsophisticated workmen and peasants. I know it is possible that the world does not contain a corner free from the slime of sentimentality, for where there has been no art people have accepted for generations the cheap substitutes poured out by the press and more recently by the cinema and the radio. If the unsophisticated man is a myth, then our civilization is already doomed. But if he does exist, and can form a nucleus from which a new world can grow, then he will demand from the artist, not a private world, but a public style.

I am not suggesting that a public style is necessarily a medieval style, or that Rouault is an artist who should be universally imitated. There are two styles of art which, though they also have been too sophisticated and private in the between-war years, do hold the possibility of a public style—I mean constructivism and *surréalisme*. Constructivism has evolved in architecture what we have already been in the habit of calling an international idiom, and an international idiom is only a sophisticated way of saying a public style. As for *surréalisme*, when it has finally accomplished its *destructive* work (and the war is rapidly doing that for it) and begins to concentrate on the problems which have been raised in art by the discovery of the unconscious, then it may evolve something in the nature of a collective idiom. In *The Integration of the Personality* Jung has suggested that the modern world is suffering from the consequences of iconoclasm, from the lack of any archetypal symbols to act as safety-valves for the suppressed forces of what he calls the collective unconscious. The

## A Coat of Many Colours

artist, from prehistoric times down to the Middle Ages, was the agent who created these symbols for society, and he has now to recover that public function.

### 65. *A Community of Individuals*

THE structure of European society is breaking down before our eyes. Apart from the conservative policy of trying to shore it up, there exist various drastic schemes for rebuilding it on a securer basis. These various schemes as evolved by representative politicians can all be reduced to three types : (1) the totalitarian state ; (2) the social democratic state ; and (3) a Christian society—which might conceivably be identical with (2) but not with (1).

So much has been written against the idea of a totalitarian state by social democrats and Christians that I do not feel it is necessary for me to repeat any of the arguments now. The subordination of the individual to an abstraction like the state is so openly contradictory to any belief in the dignity and freedom of the individual that it cannot for a moment be tolerated by someone who begins with a profession of individualism. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to point out a certain danger which modern events have shown to be inherent in purely speculative philosophy. The philosophy of Hegel, to which we can trace the ideology which has inspired modern totalitarian doctrines of the state, was first of all put forward as a justification of the autonomy of the spirit, of the faculty of thought. Hegel's conception of the state, and of the individual's relation to the state, was an abstract conception, justified by reason and logic, and even by æsthetic sensibility. Like Plato's republic, it is a pretty thing to think about. It is in its practical consequences that it is so appalling, and if Hegel had had the imagination

## A Community of Individuals

to foresee these consequences he would never have propounded the idea with such energy and insistence. For after all, Hegel himself did believe in freedom. It was, for him, rather a fundamental belief, as the following quotation shows :

If we say that the consciousness of freedom is connected with the appearance of Philosophy, this principle must be a fundamental one with those with whom Philosophy begins ; a people having this consciousness of freedom founds its existence on that principle seeing that the laws and the whole circumstances of the people are based only on the notion that Mind forms of itself, and in the categories which it has. Connected with this on the practical side, is the fact that actual freedom develops political freedom, and this only begins where the individual knows himself as an independent individual to be universal and real, where his significance is infinite, or where the subject has attained the consciousness of personality and thus desires to be esteemed for himself alone. Free, philosophic thought has this direct connection with practical freedom, that as the former supplies thought about the absolute, universal and real object, the latter, because it thinks itself, gives itself the character of universality. . . . On account of this general connection between political freedom and the freedom of thought, Philosophy only appears in History where and in as far as free institutions are formed.<sup>1</sup>

I am not sure that I can understand or accept the reasoning by which Hegel arrives at his comparatively simple conclusion, but that conclusion is a historical fact. It is a fact which has been demonstrated negatively in Hegel's country in our own time. It is all the more ironical, therefore, to observe in this same *History of Philosophy* that Hegel assigns the whole future of philosophy, and indeed all future progress in human thought, to the Teutonic world.

Every thinking man must know in his heart, even if he

<sup>1</sup> *History of Philosophy*, Introduction, B, 3, a. Trans. by E. S. Haldane. London (Kegan Paul), 1892.

## A Coat of Many Colours

does not find it expedient to confess it, that to bring into being a totalitarian conception of society is an act of despair. The whole of what we mean by civilization or culture has been built up by a dialectical process, a process which implies the free exchange and discussion of discoveries and ideas. The only alternative form of society which might seem to question such freedom of discussion is the Christian conception.

How deeply opposed the Christian doctrine is to the totalitarian conception of the state has been clearly revealed in recent pronouncements from the Vatican, particularly in the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). The Pope's drastic condemnation of the idea that the state is "something ultimate, to which everything else should be subordinated", is probably supported by Christians of every denomination. It is only when we come to the positive ideas about society which Christians put forward as an alternative to present conditions that we are likely to encounter disagreement both inside and outside the Christian community.

The Christian conception of society, considered apart from its doctrinal implications, has much to attract the individualist. The Christian is, or should be, a peaceful and just citizen, and the monastic communities which he has from time to time established *outside* the framework of society have often been a last refuge for the finer values of civilization. The *idea* of a Christian society, as advocated by an apologist like Mr. Eliot in his recent book of that title, is one which has no obvious disadvantages for the individual, for it respects his personality and will even tolerate his neutrality. And as for the social ethics of Christianity—love your neighbour as yourself, do unto others as you yourself would be done by, render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, etc.—they are perfectly consonant with the kind of society which I desire.

## A Community of Individuals

But the idea of a Christian society has been tried before in the history of the world, and from my point of view it was not a great success. It suffered from two defects which are still inseparable from the idea : an organized Church and a supernatural sanction. An organized Church implies an all-powerful institution and a hierarchy of officials, and even supposing that the institution as it exists now could be purged and reformed to give the idea of a Christian society a fair trial under modern conditions, I see no reason to suppose that it would not quickly succumb to the vices inherent in institutionalism (not merely Erastianism, but also simony, worldliness, tyranny and bureaucratic despotism). Power corrupts the natural goodness even of Christians. Or in the words of Kierkegaard who had deeply considered this problem as a Christian :

The clergy are royal officials, and officialdom is incommensurable with Christianity. . . . You see, God is sovereign, but then we also have all these human beings who want to live at ease in comfort, and so they give them all Christianity, and thus support a thousand clergymen ; nobody in the country can die happy without belonging to this vested interest ; the consequence is that they become sovereign, and it is all over with God's sovereignty ; but He must be obeyed throughout.<sup>1</sup>

The second feature of such a society is perhaps not so much an inherent defect as an anachronism. Those Christians who sincerely advocate a form of society which will not merely be based on a Christian ethic, but in which a Christian Church will be an established, pre-empted and active unit, seem to me to ignore a positive development which has taken place in the last hundred years. By various agencies—universal education, cheap books and newspapers, the technique of vulgarization—the ever-increasing

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by David F. Swenson in his Introduction to his translation of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), p. xxix.



## A Coat of Many Colours

fund of scientific knowledge about the universe and the process of its historical evolution has become so diffused that the state of *doubt*, which formerly afflicted a minority of intellectual heretics, is now universal. I would also suggest that the actual character of this knowledge has become much more positive and inclusive, leaving very little to be ascribed to the agency of a supernatural power. As a result, the minority (as it actually is) of believers, in advanced civilizations, now consists of the very ignorant and the very clever. Apart from the unquestioning belief of those few classes still untouched by the diffusion of knowledge, belief in a supernatural order requires a high degree of intellectual effort—which may explain the emphasis which apologists like M. Maritain, Mr. Eliot and Father D'Arcy nowadays place on the intellectual element in faith.

I am not suggesting that the state of our scientific knowledge is final or absolute—it obviously rests on all kinds of unverifiable hypotheses. But it presents to the lay mind a front of such credibility and logicity that in comparison any irrational explanation of the universe simply stands no chance of general acceptance. Admittedly our knowledge is not sufficient to answer the eternal questions: To what purpose were we born? What is the end of Man? But it can at least persuade us that such questions are unanswerable.

For these reasons I come to the conclusion that whatever may from a philosophical point of view be desirable, what Mr. Eliot calls a Neutral Society is inevitable. Such a society might very possibly adopt in a large measure the ethics of Christianity, which have proved on the whole so suitable to our philosophical as well as our practical needs. It might even become aware of the necessity of a more strict observance of moral laws—indeed, it is a significant fact that the loss of belief in supernatural sanctions has not entailed any diminution in the general observance of

## A Community of Individuals

Christian morality. Private morals have tended to improve in line with the general improvement in social conditions. There is absolutely no correlation nowadays between "good" people and "religious" people ; nor, for that matter, between nations which are predominantly Christian and nations which show some respect for public morality. It is the predominantly Christian countries which are most deeply committed to the amorality of power politics. Morality, in fact, has become dissociated from religion, and there is no evidence to show that it need ever again be dependent on it. It is difficult to believe that without violence to our intellectual understanding of the world we can ever again transform ourselves into what Christians mean by a Christian Society.

At the same time it is equally inconceivable that we should accept any form of society based on an alternative irrational creed. The paganism which is sometimes imposed on the naked materialism of the German system is open to the same objections as Christianity : it cannot for long contend against the scepticism of the educated majority.

This is the dilemma which faces everyone who hopes to save our present civilization by a return to religious sanctions. Whilst insisting that this dilemma is inescapable, no one who has given the least thought to the morphology of societies will be disposed to deny that they always depend for their cohesion and survival upon some unifying idea, which unifying idea has generally been of a mystical or religious kind. Only the most inveterate rationalist would be hardy enough to believe that a society might exist on a purely rational basis. I do not say that the idea of a rational society is impossible : a country like Sweden is even near to the realization of such an idea. But for my own part I do not estimate the survival value of such a society very highly—it would probably die of a kind of communal *accidie*.

## A Coat of Many Colours

As for the "mystique" of nationalism, which is probably the most vital cohesive force to-day in a country like France, and which sometimes seems to be the only adequate substitute for religion, it tends to create conditions which foster the aggressive impulses of mankind and which lead to the progressive exhaustion of our civilization by war.

I have not yet mentioned the second of the three schemes for a new society which I mentioned at the beginning of this article: democratic socialism. Democracy has been so much reviled of late that a singular fact should be stated simply: democracy has never yet been tried. Democracy is not consistent with the financial oligarchism which has prevailed in Europe and America ever since the decay of the landed aristocracy. Nothing corresponding to a democracy is possible unless a freely elected government controls the production and distribution of the economic wealth of a country and establishes a virtual egalitarianism. Nothing near to that condition of affairs exists anywhere in the world, not even in Russia where for a year or two it seemed possible. When it does exist—that is to say, when we have a classless society exploiting the resources of the earth for the general benefit of the community of individuals—then the ethical conceptions of that society will change so radically that nothing we can imagine now is likely to meet its needs—though one might suggest that the Christian ethic presupposes many of the general features of such a society.

My own objection to such a society is that, as generally envisaged by socialists, it involves that very institutionalism which I have already found fatal to the acceptance of the idea of a Christian society. The tragic fate of the Russian democracy is there to warn us. That democracy was maimed in the very process of being born, and a few sadistic obstetricians have kept their grip on the weakling ever since. It is not likely that a true democracy will ever

## A Community of Individuals

come into being so violently. If anywhere, it will probably emerge first in the British Commonwealth : we have evolved slowly towards the potentialities and we probably have a psychological predisposition for its requisite ideals—if only in such vulgar notions as fair play, team spirit, etc. But we shall have to anticipate the dangers inherent in a centralized bureaucracy, and our whole future will depend on our ability to avoid them. I believe that they can be avoided by making the ultimate ideal anarchism, and by determining every step in the transition towards and beyond democratic socialism by this ideal.

In short, anarchism is the “mystique” which I propose for a democratic society. I do not pretend that anarchism is an idea of society which can be realized as immediately as democratic socialism. I believe that the only idea of a society which is capable of guaranteeing the integrity of the person is the negation of the idea of society. Every advance towards community must be countered by an affirmation of individual freedom. Every law must allow for its violation. The greatest power must be vested in the humblest men. Every act of government must involve a limit of service and an impermanency of office. The continuity of life should be as invisible as the prevailing wind. No drums to bang, no flags to wave ; no salutes or genuflections, no armies marching or choirs singing ; but only the still small voice and the orient wheat.

### 66. *Picasso's “Guernica”*

ART long ago ceased to be monumental. To be monumental, as the art of Michelangelo or Rubens was monumental, the age must have a sense of glory. The artist must have some faith in his fellow men, and some confidence in the civilization to which he belongs. Such an attitude

## A Coat of Many Colours

is not possible in the modern world—at least, not in our Western European world. We have lived through the greatest war in history, but we find it celebrated in thousands of mean, false and essentially unheroic monuments. Ten million men killed, but no breath of inspiration from their dead bodies. Just a scramble for contracts and fees, and an unconcealed desire to make the most utilitarian use of the fruits of heroism.

Monumental art is inspired by creative actions. It may be that sometimes the artist is deceived, but he shares his illusion with his age. He lives in a state of faith, of creative and optimistic faith. But in our age even an illusion is not tenable. When it is given out that a great Christian hero is leading a new crusade for the faith, even his followers are not deceived. A Christian crusade is not fought with the aid of infidel Moors, nor with fascist bombs and tanks. And when a Republic announces that it is fighting to defend liberty and equality, we are compelled to doubt whether these values will survive the autocratic methods adopted to establish them. The artist, at the lowest level of prestige and authority he has ever reached in the history of civilization, is compelled to doubt those who despise him.

The only logical monument would be some sort of negative monument. A monument to disillusion, to despair, to destruction. It was inevitable that the greatest artist of our time should be driven to this conclusion. Frustrated in his creative affirmations, limited in scope and scale by the timidities and customs of the age, he can at best make a monument to the vast forces of evil which seek to control our lives : a monument of protestation. When those forces invade his native land, and destroy with calculated brutality a shrine peculiarly invested with the sense of glory, then the impulse to protest takes on a monumental grandeur. Picasso's great fresco is a monument to destruc-

## Picasso's "Guernica"

tion, a cry of outrage and horror amplified by the spirit of genius.

It has been said that this painting is obscure—that it cannot appeal to the soldier of the republic, to the man in the street, to the communist in his cell ; but actually its elements are clear and openly symbolical. The light of day and night reveals a scene of horror and destruction ; the eviscerated horse, the writhing bodies of men and women, betray the passage of the infuriated bull, who turns triumphantly in the background, tense with lust and stupid power ; whilst from a window Truth, whose features are the tragic mask in all its classical purity, extends her lamp over the carnage. The great canvas is flooded with pity and terror, but over it all is imposed that nameless grace which arises from their cathartic equilibrium.

Not only Guernica, but Spain ; not only Spain, but Europe, are symbolized in this allegory. It is the modern Calvary, the agony in the bomb-shattered ruins of human tenderness and faith. It is a religious picture, painted, not with the same kind, but with the same degree of fervour that inspired Grunewald and the Master of the Avignon Pietà, Van Eyck and Bellini. It is not sufficient to compare the Picasso of this painting with the Goya of the "Désastres". Goya, too, was a great artist, and a great humanist ; but his reactions were individualistic—his instruments irony, satire, ridicule. Picasso is more universal ; his symbols are banal, like the symbols of Homer, Dante, Cervantes. For it is only when the widest commonplace is infused with the intensest passion that a great work of art, transcending all schools and categories, is born ; and being born, lives immortally.

## A Coat of Many Colours

### 67. *Machine Æsthetic*

FOR the average Englishman, American industry means Ford cars and skyscrapers, and there has not been much disposition on his part to treat these phenomena philosophically, to find a new canon of beauty in them. Indeed, the Englishman prefers to confine his philosophy to the cloistered precincts of the universities (where, incidentally, the existence of a philosophy of art is not recognized) and he does not even indulge in those genial moralizations which, I believe, characterize the American business man in his leisure moments. The growth of any consciousness of the need for a new æsthetic has been very slow in our country ; what uneasiness there has been during the last hundred years has always avoided the issue, turning away from the problems presented by the machine and yearning for the return of an idealized guild system of handworkers. This tendency, which was rarely, if ever, the practical policy of industrialists themselves, was nevertheless taken seriously in some quarters ; a movement was created, if only by poets, which forced the æsthetic problem of industrial production into some sort of international prominence. What in England remained the practice of a few cranks became, on the Continent, a movement affecting industry as a whole. It is perhaps too early to claim that in its developed form this industrial æsthetic has hit England fair and square ; but in many obscure and indirect ways the practical ideals which were represented on the Continent by the Bauhaus have penetrated into this country. At least, it would be fair to say that in architecture and the related industrial arts (furniture, lighting equipment, domestic utensils, etc.) we have learned more from Germany, Scandinavia, and France than from America. This is not to claim that we have learned much ; we have so

## Machine Æsthetic

much more to unlearn than most countries. Nor does it exclude the possibility that in what we have absorbed from the Continent there is already an element which the Continent took from America.

I am not much given to defending the so-called common sense of my countrymen ; it is but a polite name for a widespread inability to perform any mental operation involving intellectual abstraction. I need not point out the advantages of this attitude in the field of politics. " Trust in God, but keep your powder dry " is our national motto, and it implies that combination of blind faith and practical cunning which has made the British Empire what it is. It is true that we may on occasions change our faith, but not as a result of intellectual suasion ; we change our faith, like our clothes, because we have grown out of them, and they begin to pinch. A change of heart is not impossible, but a change of head would be regarded as a sign of weakness. " Ours not to reason why ", to mention another national motto. The application of these generalizations to our present subject is obvious. It means that the presentation of a logical æsthetic for modern architecture and industrial art in England is quite useless. England will never proceed on *a priori* lines ; she will take it or leave it, *it* in this case being any form of dogmatic æsthetic law. The only laws that are recognized are practical laws—for the most part laws defending the rights of property owners. Even those laws which to a casual observer might seem to have an æsthetic motive—town-planning regulations, preservation of rural amenities, etc.—are always given a pragmatic or utilitarian sanction ; it is not for us a question of beauty, but of health. And naturally, we do not consciously identify health and beauty, in the manner of Hitler.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his speech at the Reichsparteitag, Nuremburg, 1936 : " Das Gebot unserer Schönheit soll immer heissen : Gesundheit."



## A Coat of Many Colours

Confronted with the beauty of New York, the Englishman will instinctively begin to explain it away. He will point out that the skyscraper is an adventitious product—the inevitable product of fantastic land values on a confined space. He finds peculiar satisfaction in demonstrating that every progressive step in the development of the skyscraper can be explained on similar materialistic lines. If this attitude was due to a tender philosophical regard for the absolute nature of beauty, it would be admirably idealistic. But the actual motive is just the contrary; the wish to deny the existence of any æsthetic quality in such a product of the machine age. What Lewis Mumford has defined as the prerequisite of any further development of æsthetic capacity in the human race—the assimilation of the machine—that is the step which so far the Englishman has refused to take. He sees a complete distinction between the vital and organic elements of his inherited concept of beauty and the purely mechanistic elements of machine production; and not being by nature a dialectician, he does not believe in the synthetic resolution of such contradictions.

Since I do not know America at first hand, I cannot assume that it already offers us the completed synthesis. I only know it is impossible that there should exist in America the formidable obstacles which face the English architect and designer whichever way he turns—the obstacle of subsidized academic prejudice, and the still greater obstacle of prevailing traditionalism and conservatism. It is the presence of these obstacles which has determined our tactics. Here the struggle is primarily an ideological one. We have to break down one concept of beauty and establish a new one. If in support of our theories we appeal to the evidence of the facts, the facts on which we rely are everywhere dominated by the residues of ancient civilizations. Conceive, if you can, the prob-

## Machine Æsthetic

ability of an architect being allowed to build a vitally modern building within the sacred precincts of Oxford or Cambridge ! But that is precisely the kind of difficulty which faces the industrial artist in England whichever way he turns. It may be that a not inconsiderable snobbery operates against the modern artist and architect in America, but snobbery can always be ridiculed and shaken ; in the Old World we need the faith to move, if not mountains, at least monuments.

The new æsthetic must be based on the fundamentally new factor in modern civilization—large-scale machine production. That method of production involves certain characteristics which contradict the accepted notion of beauty—they are generally indicated by the word *standardization*. In itself, standardization is not an æsthetic question. If a thing is beautiful, you do not diminish that beauty by reproducing it. You may complain that the reproduction is not exact, but again that has nothing to do with the question. Standardized machine products are exact replicas of one another, and if one is beautiful, the rest are beautiful. What the critics of machine art object to when they talk about standardization is not the fact of standardization, but rather its failure to reproduce certain qualities which they regard as essential to art. Art, they would say, inevitably involves a unique personal element, an arbitrary and accidental quality peculiar to the moment of creation ; and this element or quality, they assume, is not capable of being mechanically reproduced.

There are two possible answers to this objection. We may admit that certain forms of personal expression are not suitable for mechanical reproduction as standardized objects, but we claim that the creative will of the artist can and should be adapted to the new conditions. We draw attention to a certain type of modern art (abstract, non-representational or constructivist art) which, while still

## A Coat of Many Colours

remaining a very personal expression of the individual artists who produce it, is nevertheless the prototype of machine art. Such works of art could be reproduced without losing any of their æsthetic qualities ; and utilitarian objects which express similar æsthetic qualities are actually reproduced in the standard products of modern industry.

The other answer is more drastic. It challenges the values inherent in the personal or individualistic criterion of beauty. The modern car, which incorporates the refined sensibility of a succession of designers, is a collective work of art of far greater value than the painting or statue which is the expression of the mood or thought of an individual. Even the past might be appealed to in support of this contention, and great impersonal works of art like the Pyramids of Egypt or the Gothic cathedrals are quoted as examples of collective works of art. The argument is perhaps a little specious, but it may surely be admitted that the tremulous idiosyncrasies which many critics regard as the final quality in art can be sacrificed if in their stead we can place qualities of precision and exactitude which have an equal claim on the æsthetic sensibility. Perhaps the only mistake we can make is to attempt to drive art into a single track. The mystery, the magic, the imponderable and incommensurable majesty of the Sphinx exists side by side with the geometrical exactitude, the mathematical precision of the Pyramids.

### 68. *André Gide*

GENIUS is sometimes difficult to transplant, and among modern instances there is none so striking as Gide's. In France his influence pervades every section of intellectual life. *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, which he founded, has been the organ of all that is vital in contemporary French

## André Gide

literature, and the only school of thought that stands apart—the Catholics under Claudel and Massis—has to a large extent been goaded into action by Gide's success. The only comparable figure in this country is Bernard Shaw, but a comparison of the two would only serve to show how superficial and naïve a moralist must be to succeed with us. It is true that Shaw has, even ostensibly, dealt with "unpleasant" themes, but they are of the kind that require social remedies; they do not involve moral dilemmas. And yet there is something so essentially Protestant in Gide, and his problems are so much the problems of the redeemed puritan, that obviously his work should provoke great interest in a community where this type is the rule rather than the exception. Perhaps the explanation lies in fortuitous facts; six of Gide's most important books appeared in English translations between the years 1928 and 1930, and then that particular publisher went out of business. But I do not remember the books making any stir at the time, and no doubt we must look for a more convincing explanation of Gide's lack of appeal to English readers.

"Gide's work as a whole may be regarded as a prolonged debate on the subject of morality."<sup>1</sup> Gide himself would admit as much, and seek the explanation in his origins and early upbringing. His father was a professor of jurisprudence from the Cevennes; his mother a rich heiress from Normandy. They were devout Protestants, and Gide was brought up in an atmosphere of sheltered bourgeois respectability. His father died when he was eleven, and his mother acquired a very complete dominance over his affections. Already in his boyhood he betrayed neurotic symptoms; on account of his precocious sexual instincts, he was expelled from his first school. In *Si le Grain ne meurt*, his early development is related with com-

<sup>1</sup> Léon Pierre-Quint: *André Gide*. London (Cape), 1934.

## A Coat of Many Colours

plete frankness ; but there is a passage in that book where, seeking to explain his personality in terms of heredity, Gide unconsciously betrays his limitations as a psychologist. He has been speaking of the extraordinary difference between the two families from which he sprang, and between the provinces to which they belonged—contradictory influences joined in him.

Often I feel that I was forced to create a work of art because only in that way could I harmonize those elements which otherwise would have continued to war within me—or at least to debate. There is no doubt that the only people who are capable of positive achievements are those who can prolong the line of their heredity in a single direction. On the other hand, I believe that eccentrics and artists are recruited from among the offspring of cross-breeding, in whom contradictory forces coexist, and multiply and neutralize each other.

For proof Gide appeals to history, but complains that his dictionaries and biographies never tell us about the maternal origin of great men. If they had, it might have been necessary to amend his generalization, for it is not borne out by the facts, so far as we know them. The facts, for example, classified by Havelock Ellis in his *Study of British Genius*, show that out of 1030 persons included in the inquiry, only 133 were of mixed British, or mixed British and foreign origin. But the point I wish to make is that the very reason given by Gide as the probable explanation of his development as an artist is really the explanation of why he is such an imperfect artist. I believe it could be shown that the artist is never a moralist, that there is an incompatibility between the "judging" attitude and the "creative" attitude, for the latter is always sympathetic. But it is perhaps sufficient to point out that in none of Gide's books, with the possible exception of *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue*, has the author betrayed that sense of form which is essential to the work of art. We should note

## André Gide

with suspicion how often his books take the form of a journal—that most inartistic mode of literary expression. Gide's works, in fact, are one long Agenbite of Inwit, the self-examination of a conscience-stricken moralist. Gide's importance, that is to say, is primarily ethical and sociological; he is a writer of excellent prose, and on that account is to be acknowledged as a skilled craftsman.

Even when we calmly consider his work from this point of view, we have to admit that he has been preceded by a greater figure, whose achievement overshadows Gide's, and of whom Gide is but a humble follower—I mean Nietzsche. Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are Gide's masters, his work a dilution and extension of theirs (just as Shaw's work is a clever exegesis of Butler, Ibsen and Marx). In a sense, however, it is misleading to trail these names across Gide's track, because Gide has neither aimed at the consistency of a philosophy nor at the creation of an epic. His work is personal, and the best part of it is introspective. Above all, it is the problem of personal sincerity that has exercised Gide's mind, for he has seen clearly enough that the problem of sincerity is the key to æsthetic as well as moral values.

This irritating problem [he once wrote] is everything to me. To know whether I feel what I believe myself to be feeling; whether I am my single self or double, or triple, or nothing; whether I flow from my consciousness or am coincident therewith; if beneath the continuous deterioration of body and soul, anything of me remains constant.

Absolute sincerity, Gide concludes, is only possible in the act of creation; that is to say, when the reason retires and "truth speaks for itself and prevails by virtue of its immediacy". It will be obvious how directly such a theory leads to individualism in ethics. What is more difficult to see is how it leads to communism in politics.

## A Coat of Many Colours

The somewhat sinister quality in Gide's reputation is due to his attitude towards homosexuality ; he is the first modern writer of any status who has openly condoned inversion ; he has done more, for in *Corydon* he has idealized it. To what extent his attitude can be justified on scientific and historical grounds is perhaps a moot point ; Mr. Montgomery Belgion, who discussed the question at some length in the study of Gide included in his book, *Our Present Philosophy of Life*, came to the conclusion that in our present state of knowledge no scientific basis for Gide's attitude was possible. There is no doubt, however, that Gide was justified in lifting the taboo which had hitherto suppressed any sane discussion of the subject. But the furore he thus raised subsided before the greater scandal of his acceptance and subsequent rejection of communism. He first accepted communism as the expression of his passion for freedom and justice : he went to Russia and discovered that the social reality had little correspondence to the political ideal. On his return he proved himself faithful, not to a creed, nor to a promise, but to the evidence of his own senses. It was an act of integrity worthy of his admired Montaigne, if not precisely with Montaigne's motive. Somewhere in his *Journal* Gide says that no one could persuade him to believe in God because it would make life more agreeable. He feels that his strength comes from the disdain of comfort, and for that reason he would reject "le mol et doux oreiller de Montaigne". It is perhaps for that reason, he adds, that he is attracted to communism—just as, for the same reason, others fear it. But in the end he would admit that such stoic aids to virtue are not to be purchased at the cost of personal integrity.

The subtlety and variety of Gide's intelligence are not covered by this brief note. I think it will be found, when the perspective is clear enough, that he has been the most representative spirit of his tormented age—representative

## The Duality of Leonardo

in his profundity, but also in some quality which I can only call a profound insincerity. "Les extrêmes me touchent" is his adopted motto : it is the motto of a divided mind.

### 69. *The Duality of Leonardo*

THE name of Leonardo da Vinci inspires something like universal awe : with a certain type of intellectual he is almost the object of a cult. No other man, it would seem, has ever had such a diverse intelligence, or been so supreme at once in art and in science. Goethe perhaps comes nearest, but by comparison Goethe is imperfect and fallible ; and Goethe himself would not have ventured the comparison. And though there are Goethe Societies up and down the world, they do not practise a cult. For the basis of a cult is a mystery, and from the first Leonardo was a mysterious figure. He was even in danger of being regarded as a necromancer and heretic ; his experiments had to be conducted in secret and his observations confined to cryptic notebooks. But the real basis of the fascination he has exercised is what Pater described as the tendency of his genius "to lose itself in a refined and graceful mystery". The mystery, that is to say, is not so much in the circumstances of Leonardo's life and activity, as in the products of his genius. During the whole period of the formation of the Leonardo legend, from his death in 1519 to, say, the date of Pater's famous essay (1869), those products were largely his works of art—that is to say, paintings like the "Mona Lisa", the "Last Supper", and the "Virgin of the Rocks". The existence of his manuscripts was, of course, well known, but they were generally regarded as *ghiribizzi*, idle scribblings ; only the *Trattato della Pittura*, or Treatise on Painting, a compilation which was probably made shortly after Leonardo's death by one of his pupils,



## A Coat of Many Colours

had been published before 1883, which is the date of J. P. Richter's pioneer edition of the complete manuscripts.

The extent of these manuscripts is more than five thousand pages, of all shapes and sizes, and they cover a wide variety of subject. The standard English translation, by Edward MacCurdy,<sup>1</sup> very conveniently sorts Leonardo's notes according to their subject-matter. There are forty sections, ranging from Anatomy, Natural History and Optics to Warfare, Art and Personalia. The range is, indeed, encyclopædic, for there is no department of human *knowledge* into which Leonardo did not pry with a curious and penetrating mind. It is necessary to emphasize the word "knowledge" because there is one kind of mental activity in which Leonardo did not indulge—that which we call metaphysics. It is true that Mr. MacCurdy has a section which is headed Philosophy; but it consists for the most part of moral precepts, such as "Wine is good, but water is preferable at table", or "One ought not to desire the impossible".

The question which we must now ask is: What effect does all this comparatively new material have upon the legend? The legend was built up on the evidence of a dozen pictures and the usual gossip; here are 1,200 printed pages which reveal the mind of Leonardo in the precise terms of his logical mode of expression. The mind of Leonardo is no longer a mystery: it is as exactly delineated as any psychological type ever will be.

It cannot be pretended that the type is universal; we have only to contrast it with minds like Plato's and Shakespeare's to see that there are whole worlds which Leonardo does not touch. If for a moment we put aside Leonardo's artistic activity, and concentrate only on his restless research into natural phenomena, we shall have no difficulty in

<sup>1</sup> *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, translated and edited by Edward MacCurdy, 2 vols. London (Jonathan Cape), 1938.

## The Duality of Leonardo

admitting that Leonardo is to be regarded as a great scientist and inventor, a genius who anticipated many of the discoveries of subsequent centuries, not only in natural science, but also in practical mechanics—even modern inventions like the aeroplane and tank. He was something like a combination of Darwin and Edison, though it is doubtful whether he had the particular kind of synthetic imagination which results in an hypothesis like the *Origin of Species*. His method was purely empirical, a process of observation and analysis of the nature of what exists, and of trial and error in the creation of what had not hitherto existed. Of such a character have been all the world's great natural philosophers, and it is to be observed of them that, however much they add to our understanding of the world, they have not altered the quality of our existence. As a result of their inventions, men may be physically happier, but they are not spiritually more content.

If we now turn to Leonardo's remarks on art, particularly the art of painting which he held to be superior to all other arts, we shall find that he carries into this domain the same scientific method and ideals which he applied to the natural world. It soon becomes apparent that he regards art too as a means to the understanding of "the infinite works of nature", and painting as superior to the other arts precisely because it is the most exact means of recording those works, the sole imitator of all the visible works of man—

a subtle invention which with philosophical and ingenious speculation takes as its theme all the various kinds of forms, airs and scenes, plants, animals, grasses and flowers, which are surrounded by light and shade . . . The mind of the painter should be like a mirror which always takes the colour of the thing that it reflects, and which is filled by as many images as there are placed before it.

This is, of course, the naturalistic theory of painting in all its purity, and all Leonardo's precepts on light, shading,

## A Coat of Many Colours

perspective, etc., have one object—to make the picture an exact image of the natural object. He seriously recommends the painter to take a flat mirror and set it so that it reflects the object represented in the picture, and then to compare the reflection with the painting. His observations of light and shade anticipate and indeed are far more subtle than those of the Impressionists, though he would never have followed the Impressionists in their attempt to render the transient aspects of nature.

All this, of course, is merely emphasizing the fact that Leonardo was in this respect but the foremost and most logical representative of a whole tradition. But it would be mere idolatry to suppose that because Leonardo was the possessor of such a great intellect, his theory of art was necessarily the right one. It is, at any rate, possible to put forward a theory which directly contradicts it, and which is just as fully warranted by the history of art. The two possible activities which we may thus set in opposition are : (1) to observe and record, and (2) to feel and express. Leonardo might have objected that we cannot feel without first observing, and that to feel strongly we must observe accurately. But apart from the probability that feeling is a general and diffused response of the whole organism to its environment (suggested, for example, by the fact that children born blind have images which they can express in plastic form), it is fundamental to the nature of art that feeling is intensified in the degree that art is selective. The strongest feelings are aroused by the simplest means, and the art of poetry, which Leonardo despised, has far more power to move men to laughter and tears than any form of pictorial representation.

Leonardo's own paintings go far to contradict his theories. Neither the "Mona Lisa" nor the "Virgin of the Rocks" could be found in a mirror's reflection ; and the "Last Supper" is a schematic projection of the scene

## The Duality of Leonardo

rather than an actual representation of it : there is far more actuality in Rubens' version of the subject, more still in Tintoretto's. In other words, in his highest moments Leonardo himself departs from nature to create a supernatural poetry. Of that poetic imagination there is little trace in the 1,200 pages of these notebooks ; but once or twice even his pen betrays him, as when he writes : " If liberty is dear to you, may you never discover that my face is love's prison "—a sentence that might describe, but not explain, the mysterious suggestiveness of the " Mona Lisa ". Unfortunately for the history of painting, the majority of Leonardo's successors were not to be so much inspired by the spirit of his paintings as indoctrinated with his precepts. If Leonardo's paintings have come to express some of the most transcendental feelings of mankind, his *Treatise on Painting*, on the other hand, has been used as a justification for all that is most academic and stultifying in the teaching of art.

### 70. *The " Areopagitica "*

THE speech which Milton addressed to the Parliament of England in 1644 " for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing " was provoked by the particular circumstances of the time. Those circumstances had their pattern in the past, most notably in the Spanish Inquisition : but Milton could not have foreseen that they would recur in the future, and that three hundred years after the appearance of his pamphlet, his words would be as apt as if they had come hot from the press. The *Areopagitica* is Milton's greatest prose work, and this rank is given to it on account of its inherent qualities of fervour and style : but it is great also because of its wisdom, its logic and the universal application of its argument. Every newly established tyranny brings its

## A Coat of Many Colours

pages to life again : there is no encroachment on " the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely " which it does not anticipate, and oppose with unanswerable reason.

The public measures and commercial practices which to-day threaten the liberty of printing will not be far to seek, but before I review them I would like to draw attention to some features of the situation which provoked Milton's speech that find their counterpart in our own situation. It is sometimes assumed that the questions which agitated our country in the seventeenth century, and particularly those which broke over Milton's head, were so theological or doctrinal in their nature that they no longer concern us. Milton is one of the chief protagonists of the Reformation in England : the Reformation is past and done with, and the dust has settled on ten thousand tracts. If we exempt one or two of them from oblivion, it is for qualities of style which we manage to enjoy while remaining indifferent to the underlying argument.

That this is a mistaken and superficial attitude is made very clear in the present instance. We now realize, more clearly than ever Milton could have done, that revolutions have their evolution : they are caused by an irreconcilable conflict of wills, but from the victory of the revolutionary party there emerges, not unity, but a reflection of the old conflict. It seems easier for men to unite to destroy than it is for them to unite to construct. Just as the French Revolution gave birth to the violent struggle of Girondins and Jacobins, Dantonists and Robespierrists, and just as in our time in Russia we have seen revolution succeeded by the fratricidal strife of Menshevik and Bolshevik, Stalinists and Trotskyites, so after the Reformation in England there was a bitter dispute between Presbyterians and Independents. What was the precise doctrinal difference between these reforming sects we need not stop to enquire : but the Presbyterians were for the establish-

## The "Areopagitica"

ment of a new orthodoxy, and were the immediate object of that most bitter taunt of Milton's, that "new presbyter is but old priest writ large".

In the exercise of the liberty to argue freely "according to conscience", Milton had not hesitated to argue freely where his own conscience pricked him most keenly—that is to say, on the subject of divorce. The Order of Parliament requiring all publications to be licensed for press by an official censor, and to be registered in the books of the Stationers' Company, had already been in force for two months when Milton issued his pamphlet on *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, uncensored and unregistered. The printing might have been in train before the Order was promulgated, but to make quite clear that his defiance was deliberate, Milton issued a second and enlarged edition in February, 1644, and addressed it openly to Parliament and the Assembly of Divines.

We must remember that England was in a state of civil war. Milton belonged to the ascendant parliamentary party, and enjoyed the patronage and protection of its leader, Cromwell. The outraged Presbyterians could not hope to succeed in a personal indictment. They therefore tried to catch Milton in the net of the law, and for this purpose entered into alliance with the Stationers' Company. In August, 1644, the Company was induced to petition the House of Commons to take action against all writers who were showing contempt of the printing ordinance. It was then that Milton roused himself to a defence of unlicensed printing, addressing his remonstrance direct to Parliament.

The Order of Parliament of 14 June, 1643, is drafted for a far-reaching effect. The Preamble recounts that "many false . . . scandalous, seditious, and libellous" works have lately been published "to the great defamation of Religion and government", and complains that many private printing-

## A Coat of Many Colours

presses have been set up, thus infringing the monopoly rights of the Stationers' Company. It then orders, among its several provisions, that no Book, etc., "shall from henceforth be printed or put to sale, unless the same be first approved of and licensed by such person or persons as both or either of the said Houses shall appoint for the licensing of the same". In plain words, every manuscript must be submitted to official censorship, and licensed, before it can be printed. But even then the copyright—that is, the right to copy the manuscript in printed type—is vested in the Stationers' Company; that is to say, it is their monopoly, an interest vested in them "for their relief and the maintenance of their poor", and the Order of Parliament gives them full power to enforce this right, and calls upon all "Justices of the Peace, Captains, Constables and other officers" to assist in the search for unlicensed presses, and to break them up; to search for unlicensed books and to confiscate them; and to "apprehend all authors, printers and others" concerned in publishing unlicensed books and to bring them before the Houses of Parliament or "the Committee of Examination" for "further punishments".

It was against this totalitarian edict that Milton hurled his scorn and eloquence, his learning and his logic. Again he defied the regulations and issued his pamphlet unlicensed and unregistered. He took Parliament by storm, and though its deliberations on the subject are not recorded, he won the day. He was never prosecuted, and the Order of Parliament became a dead letter. It is true that it was not the end of the attempt to impose a censorship on printed books. That attempt is made whenever a sufficient excuse is discovered in war or revolution: we have seen it made in our own time. If our vigilance continues armed with invincible weapons, it is mainly because Milton forged them in his *Areopagitica*. His arguments are

## The "Areopagitica"

immortal, but it is the duty of every age to review them, to burnish them till they shine in a new light, and sharpen them for a present use.

There are four principal arguments in Milton's speech. All I intend to do is to restate them in our current phraseology, and give them application to our current affairs.

There is first what we should now call the pragmatic argument. Milton's way of expressing it is simple, and we perhaps only add complications of no value if we convert his words into our modern jargon. "Assuredly", says Milton, "we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary." Trial by what is contrary suggests the dialectical theory of the progressive development of thought which Hegel introduced into modern philosophy, and which has played such a part in the social philosophy of Marx and his followers. But I do not think Milton can be claimed for dialectical materialism. Truth might not be wholly revealed to human nature, but he did believe in its absolute nature or existence. He did not suppose that it was something which was being *discovered* by a continuous process of trial and error: he would have said, rather, that we have an intuitive knowledge of truth which must nevertheless be continually proved by the process of trial and error. The doctrine of free will, so foreign to dialectical materialism, is involved: "what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forebear without the knowledge of evil?" It is a philosophical distinction and may therefore seem of little importance to some people: but it might nevertheless explain why the practical exponents of dialectical materialism have shown such a readiness in our time to suppress what they consider false or evil: why they have become reincarnations of those "glutton Friars" and dour Presbyters against whom Milton directed his arguments.



## A Coat of Many Colours

Milton was above all a Humanist—the greatest representative in England of that movement which had abandoned the dogmatism of the Middle Ages and was seeking for a natural or empirical basis for its beliefs. That is why I have called his first argument for the liberty of the press pragmatic. He would have subscribed to William James's definition : " True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot." But how can this process of assimilation, corroboration and verification go on unless there is the freest circulation of the relevant facts. And facts are facts independently of our discrimination of them : we cannot wish them away, or legislate them into oblivion. They are the dust and heat, through which the race for the immortal garland is to be run. And if your aim is a philosophical one, the relevant facts are in controversy, and in our days controversy is in books.

Since therefore [concludes Milton] the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity then by reading all manner of tractats, and hearing all manner of reason ? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.

There are plenty of people to-day ready to give their assent to this first argument of Milton's who yet boggle at some specific application of it to present circumstances. They say that Milton was generalizing from theological or philosophical premisses, and that he did not have in mind, for example, questions of public morals or provisions for public safety. Milton, however, made no exceptions. He did not exempt books from the normal incidence of the law ; he admitted that their authors should be punished if convicted of libel, scandal or blasphemy. But the punish-

## The "Areopagitica"

ment is always *ex post facto*, and there is no prohibition of the means available to the delinquent. Indeed, Milton discusses at some length those scurrilous writers of antiquity, and is clearly of the opinion that there never was a case for suppressing any of them, not even "that Petronius whom Nero call'd his Arbiter" nor "that notorious ribald of Arezzo, dreaded and yet dear to the Italian Courtiers".

Milton's tolerance of the printing even of obscenities follows more logically, perhaps, from his second and third arguments, to which I now pass. These two arguments are connected : one points to the extreme difficulty of knowing where to draw the line between what is true and what is false, what is good and what is evil ; and the other points to the impossibility of finding individuals competent to draw such a line, supposing it to exist. Generally, on the first of these scores, Milton argues that the kind of control contemplated in the Order of Parliament is impossible of application : "this order of licencing conduces nothing to the end for which it was framed." If your end is the restriction of heresy, why stop at books ? "If we think to regulat Printing, thereby to rectifie manners, we must regulat all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightfull to man. . . There must be licencing dancers, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth but what by their allowance shall be thought honest . . ." We could extend the list to-day, for though we have an illogical censorship of the theatre, and a farcical censorship of the cinema, the means of propagating heresy, corruption and all other mental errors through the press and broadcasting are limitless. But the complexity of the task of censorship does not deter our legislators, and in many parts of the world Milton's arguments are needed, not so much for the liberty of unlicensed printing, as for the liberty of any kind of expression. Perhaps it would be more realistic to say that the truth of this particular argument of Milton's has

## A Coat of Many Colours

been recognized, but in countries where liberty is an inconvenience to a tyrannous government, no limit is set to the scope of censorship. Milton thought he was asking a rhetorical question when he said: "And who shall silence all the airs and madrigalls, that whisper softness in chambers?" ; but we have lived to see these, and other fancies he thought absurd, come to pass throughout most of Europe. Not knowing where to draw the line, our modern tyrants have made it all-inclusive: it is the totalitarian logic.

Totalitarian government has an equally effective answer to Milton's third argument. In his innocence of our modern efficiency, Milton imagined that though licensing were imposed, writing would still continue, and that men would freely submit their manuscripts to the official censors. He therefore found it difficult to imagine a body of men with either the patience or the competence to carry out such an enormous task. His description of such a judge will strike a modern publisher's reader as painfully apt:

If he be of such worth as behoovs him, there cannot be a more tedious and displeasing Journey-work, a greater losse of time levied upon his head, then to be made the perpetuall reader of unchosen books and pamphlets, oftentimes huge volumes. There is no book that is acceptable unlesse at certain seasons; but to be enjoyn'd the reading of that at all times, and in a hand scars legible, whereof three pages would not down at any time in the fairest Print, is an imposition which I cannot beleieve how he that values time, and his own studies, or is but of a sensible nostrill should be able to endure.

But this, of course, is not what happens in modern censorship. There is, no doubt, a thin trickle of unsolicited matter which must be read by some poor drudge. But the modern method is to print only what is initiated by the State, and entrusted to reliable servants to execute. The

## The "Areopagitica"

totalitarian censorship operates on the mind of the public, not on the manuscripts of its writers.

But all this makes Milton's final argument all the more relevant to our present circumstances. "I lastly proceed", says Milton, "from the no good it can do, to the manifest hurt it causes, in being first the greatest discouragement and affront, that can be offered to learning and to learned men." This is partly a psychological argument. A man does not become learned without acquiring a certain sense of dignity or self-respect. If the State infringes this delicate structure of confidence and freedom, the intellect itself suffers—recoils and atrophies. In his travels Milton had found and visited "the famous Galileo grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking in Astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licencers thought", and that sight and its significance had been deeply impressed on his youthful mind. In other countries,

where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes [he had] sat among their lerned men . . . and bin counted happy to be born in such a place of *Philosophic* freedom, as they suppos'd England was, while themselvs did nothing but bemoan the servil condition into which lerning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damp't the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had bin there writt'n now these many years but flattery and fustian".

In his first argument Milton has said that truth must be tested against error: what he is now saying is that truth nevertheless can never be stabilized or defined. It is in a continuous state of emergence, the issue of ceaseless mental strife. "Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopoliz'd and traded in by tickets and statutes, and standards. We must not think to make a staple commodity of all the knowledge in the Land, to mark and licence, it like our broad cloth, and our wooll packs." Or, as we might say to-day, truth cannot be rationed, or

## A Coat of Many Colours

standardized, or cut to a pattern of utility. Truth cannot be controlled in any way : it is the unpredictable outcome of the exercise of free will, a harmony of colours which are discordant as they lie juxtaposed on the canvas, but mingle and cohere in the vision. Milton himself uses a vivid architectural metaphor :

when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world ; neither can every peece of the building be of one form ; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. . . . There must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built.

Milton welcomes the free circulation of schisms and heresies. Let every man, he says, be his own prophet. If the root be strong, what matter how we branch out? He then indulges in that greatest metaphor with which his tract is adorned : his picture of the City "besieg'd and blockt about, her navigable river infested, inrodes and incursions round, defiance and battell oft rumor'd to be marching up ev'n to her walls, and suburb trenches" and the people within this city "wholly tak'n up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reform'd . . . disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity, and admiration, things not before discoursed or writt'n of". And this, he continues, far from being a sign of weakness in that city or nation, "argues first a singular good will, contentedness and confidence in your prudent foresight, and safe government, Lords and Commons". It is a sign of organic health.

For as in a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital, but to rationally faculties, and those in the acutest, and the pertest

## The "Areopagitica"

operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is, so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has, not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest points of controversie, and new invention, it betok'ns us not degenerated, nor drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrincl'd skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious waies of Truth and prosperous vertue destin'd to become great and honourable in these latter ages.

Then follows that supremely beautiful passage envisaging "a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep; and shaking her invincible locks."

Such are Milton's arguments for the liberty of unlicensed printing. Not one of them is without its aptness to-day, and though in our state of siege we have not wholly abrogated this liberty above all liberties, there is a dull acquiescence in the many restrictions that have been imposed, and a tolerance of their abuse. We have not come through this time of trial without some cause for doubting whether England is still a place of philosophic freedom. Refugees from foreign tyranny have been imprisoned on suspicion of their opinions, and not on any proven transgressions of law. Englishmen who have too openly expressed their sympathy with the false and illiberal philosophy of our enemies have been arrested and detained without open trial. A specious sophistry has been used to arrest and imprison men whose moral objections to war were as strong and as sincerely held as any which could be brought under a religious rubric. But these are blatant and occasional infringements of our liberties which will, I hope, disappear with the state of war which has given them their only sanction. What I feel more concerned about are certain tendencies which prolong their dark shadows into the time of peace and reconstruction. I refer

## A Coat of Many Colours

to the growing power of trade associations, and to the proposal, freely canvassed, that such associations should be entrusted with what is called a planning or rationalization of their particular trade. For the printing and publishing of books is a trade, and there have not been lacking voices to call for its regimentation.

In Milton's time, as we have seen, the task of censorship was to be entrusted to the contemporary trade association, the Stationers' Company. Since Milton's time those corrupted remnants of the free guilds, which tried their best for many years to restrict trade and to immobilize labour, came under the control of Parliament and for the most part only continued to exist as picturesque survivals of a past economy. But within recent years—and largely as a counterpart to the organized associations of workmen—these bodies have been revived, though generally under new names and with new functions. That they are a necessary feature of the totalitarian state is not to be denied : a centralized economy must have institutions through which it can transmit its rigid control of the lives and actions of its citizens. This is not the occasion to discuss the economic aspects of the question : there is undoubtedly much to be said for the planned production and distribution of the material necessities of life. But the control of material is apt to give the controllers consequential powers whose abuse cannot be prevented. The materials of publishing are not to be treated as ordinary merchandise ; for the control of these materials cannot be easily distinguished from the control of the words and thoughts they disseminate.

This wider threat has no sanction in war : it is a proposal for peace. Our publishing trade must, it is said, be planned, and if publishers cannot put their own house in order, the state must intervene. Liberty, we are told by one of our leading publishers, is a barren intellectual concept. " Books and authors, the literary art and science of a great nation,

## The "Areopagitica"

are too important to be left to the unrestricted scope of private enterprise." Publishers as a corporate body "should find a way of discouraging the minority from actions dangerous to publishers as a whole".<sup>1</sup> These may look well as the pious sentiments of a tidy mind : but the field of truth, as Milton describes it, is not tidy : it is a battlefield. We may deplore the waste of paper and labour on tracts that are pernicious, on books and periodicals that cater for the lowest levels of taste. But prohibition is no cure for the evil. The prettiest of flowers are a culture from the wilderness of weeds, and a garden in which only red roses are allowed to bloom is not only monotonous : it is a cemetery in which all adventure lies buried.

I am not recommending that we should let things be—that we should stand aside in idle indifference. But it is public taste and public sensibility which should be improved, by education, by example, by the abundance of beauty and the free intercourse of creative spirits. These manifestations come spontaneously from the groundwork of a free community, and because they are spontaneous, they seek and find many and diverse channels of expression. For this reason I would not strive to prevent the establishment of a state publishing house, or a guild of publishers, or a guild of authors publishing their own works : I would add to private enterprise any institutions of co-operation and mutual aid which promised diversity and ease of communication. It is the character of restrictions that they breed and multiply, until, as Milton so vividly says, we "fall again into a grosse conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of wood and hay and stubble forc't and frozen together". But Liberty is absolute : it suffers no limitation to its range, no definition of its measures. It is a reflection of the confident belief that when the dust of

<sup>1</sup> Mr. F. J. Warburg in an address to the Publishers' Advertising Circle, 24 September, 1942.



## A Coat of Many Colours

controversy has settled, and many subtle engines lie broken in the ditches, the divine image of truth shall stand, simple, radiant, and benign.

### 71. *Envoy*

EVERYWHERE, in that ominous summer of 1939, we found deserted hotels, silent but not unfriendly people, good roads but poor food. When we reached the Italian Lakes we had been travelling strenuously for a week or more, and decided to rest for two or three days at a spot I had marked for such a purpose some years before—the Hermitage at San Vigilio. It stands on the eastern shore of Lake Garda, overlooking a miniature harbour. The charm of the place comes not only from its situation, but also from a stage-like antiquity—it is opposite the peninsula of Sermione, Catullus's retreat, and everything had been done, back in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, to enhance its classical associations. White statues gleam between dark cypresses, and here and there, cut into the garden walls and half hidden by the hanging weeds, is an elegant Latin inscription.

The harbour is not much bigger than a pond, but it is perfect, with its "sea-front" and landing-stage. It shelters perhaps half a dozen fishing boats, which set out with their russet sails at sunset—the fishing is a night industry, and this makes the place all the sleepier during the day. The fishers emerge about midday and take a prolonged siesta sitting against the whitewashed walls of their cottages, which in their turn lean sleepily against the cliffs.

From the balcony of the hotel, where we had all our meals, we looked down on this peaceful scene. Normally a lake-steamer calls twice a day, but the service had been

## Envoy

suspended—there were not enough tourists. Occasionally a rowing-boat would drift slowly round the headland to the north of the harbour.

Then one day, the third of our stay, the peace was suddenly broken. We had finished lunch and were sipping our coffee on the balcony when some echoing hoots warned us of the approach of a steamer. Actually there were two of them, and as they came round the headland we saw that they were crowded with tourists. They approached slowly and came to anchor outside the harbour. At first we viewed them with mild curiosity, but as they came within range of all our senses, this curiosity turned to apprehension, and slowly to mystified horror.

A holiday excursion is not a welcome sight to anyone enjoying peace and solitude. We might have fled indoors at once, but were held by the odd behaviour of this crowd. They shouted, some of them, but not in any sort of unison. They waved their handkerchiefs or hats, but in aimless jerks. Their sweaty faces seemed to be lifted towards us, and for a time we thought their shouts might be intended for us, but they never waited for an answer. The majority were fat, the men bald, with open shirts and thick pink necks ; their knees showing between dirty leather shorts and white stockings. The women wore blouses and skirts of cheap printed cotton.

The shouts and snatches of talk that reached us were in German. Some of the passengers were scrambling into boats, and I began to fear an invasion of our privacy. They landed, these few, but there was little for them to see—no shops, no bar, no café—nothing but a steep path up the lake side, some fishing boats, and some fishermen who sat stolidly under their walls, not moving, not speaking. The shouting and gesticulating continued ; the bunched groups on the steamers were eating oranges, throwing the rind into the harbour, along with screwed-up tissue papers,

## A Coat of Many Colours

cigar butts, all the characteristic droppings of Mass-man. And all the time grimacing and uttering their strange disconnected cries.

It had soon become apparent that it was one of the "Kraft durch Freude" tours organized by the Nazis, and though in reality the crowd's appearance was not very different from a bank-holiday excursion in England, I was ready to find a racial or a political excuse for my disdain. So, for that matter, was the Italian waitress who had come out to watch from the same balcony, and stood near us. She brought some news which immediately made the odd behaviour of the crowd more understandable—it was a party consisting entirely of the deaf or the dumb. But only Germans, I thought, perhaps only Nazis, would think of herding together a lot of similarly afflicted people and sending them off to a foreign country to enjoy themselves.

The hooters had sounded and the Breughel figures were scrambling aboard again. Soon they were gone, trailing their discordant cries and the sentimental wail of an accordion—played by the deaf, perhaps, for the benefit of the dumb. The silence was deeper than ever. The sun had disappeared behind the distant mountains. The lovely twilight settled mistily over the surface of the lake.

Then from the group under the houses a fisherman got up and crossed below us. He was carrying a long-handled shovel and made his way to the outer wall of the little harbour, where it joined the rocks and pebbly beach. He began to shovel up some pebbles, throwing them into the water in a heap. Perhaps a dozen shovelfuls, and then he went back.

We were completely puzzled by this action, and asked the waitress for an explanation. It was as simple as it was astounding. He was creating a current which would slowly coil round the harbour, carrying with it all the débris which the trippers had left floating on its surface.

## Envoy

Presumably the pebbles still retained the heat of the midday sun, and when dropped into the water, caused it to expand in this particular spot and with this particular effect.

It was a small incident, but even then, before the storm had broken over Europe, it already seemed like a fragment of ancient wisdom, confronting with its dignity and simplicity the deaf and dumb emissaries of a civilization that had nothing but horror to bring into the world.

## Notes

The essays published in this volume are selected from the various products of my critical activity during the past twenty years. None of them has been previously published in book form, though here and there a paragraph which has escaped my memory may have been incorporated in one of my books. In the main these are occasional essays—a volume of more formal essays was published seven years ago (*Collected Essays in Literary Criticism*, Faber & Faber, 1938)—and I have deliberately refrained from giving them any classification: they have no particular design on the reader; I wish them to be read for their variety. I have been so often accused of inconsistency that I must expect a renewal of the charge now that I have tied so many faggots into a convenient bundle: but against a single-minded fanaticism I can only protest with Burke (whom I am inconsistent enough to admire) that my opinions come “from one who wishes to preserve consistency; but who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end; and, when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it upon one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise”.

In the notes which follow I have endeavoured to record those periodicals in which the essays first appeared, and would like to take this opportunity of proffering any acknowledgements which may be due to their editors.

H. R.

1. Not previously published. The translation of the passage from Rilke's “Letters to a Young Poet” is by Dr. K. W. Maurer.
2. Composite: partly from an unpublished lecture, partly from an article and review contributed to the *Listener*.
3. Introduction to the catalogue of an exhibition of Klee's work at the Leicester Galleries, February, 1941.
4. From the *Listener*, 1938.
5. From the *Bibliophile's Almanac*, 1928. Lawrence discusses this article in his *Letters*, ed. David Garnett, London (Heinemann), 1938, pp. 547-51.
6. From the *Comrade*, 1943.
7. From the *Times Literary Supplement*. I have published a more general study of James in *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism* (London, Faber & Faber, 1938), pp. 354-66.
8. Introduction to an exhibition.

## Notes

9. From a review.
10. Composite, chiefly from the *Listener*, 1939.
11. A broadcast. Compare my *Wordsworth* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1930).
12. From the *Listener*.
13. From *Now*.
14. From the *Listener*.
15. From *News Letter*.
16. From the *Observer*, on the occasion of the centenary of Morris's birth, 1934.
17. From the *Listener*.
18. From the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1926.
19. From *Now*.
20. From *Circle* (Faber & Faber, 1937).
21. From the *New English Weekly*.
22. From the *Listener*.
23. From the *Spectator*.
24. From the *Listener*.
25. A broadcast, with additional material from a review. Cf. *In Defence of Shelley*. (London, Heinemann, 1936).
26. From the *Listener*.
27. From the *Observer*.
28. From the *Listener* and the *Spectator*.
29. From *Cinema Quarterly*.
30. From the *Listener*, 1930.
31. Introduction to an exhibition of paintings (Dublin, 1943).
32. A broadcast. A further essay on Hawthorne appears in *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism*, pp. 265-79.
33. From the *Listener*. A further essay on Hopkins appears in *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism*, pp. 331-53.
34. From the *Listener*.
35. A broadcast.
36. From the *Listener*.
37. Broadcast (1944), with passages from a review.
38. From a lecture. Cf. *Surrealism*. (London, Faber & Faber, 1936), for a larger treatment of the same subject.
39. From the *New English Weekly*.
40. From the *Spectator*.
41. From the *Listener*.
42. A foreword to *Ethics in Modern Art*, by Marjorie Bowen (Conway Memorial Lecture, 1939).
43. From the *Criterion*.
44. From a lecture. Cf. *Art and Society* (new edition in the press; London, Faber & Faber), Chapter V.
45. From the *Spectator*.
46. From *Cinema Quarterly*.
47. Broadcast.
48. From the *Listener*.

## A Coat of Many Colours

49. From *Poetry* (London).
50. From *Axis*.
51. Composite: partly from reviews in the *Spectator* and the *Listener*. The quotations are from the various volumes of Kierkegaard's works published by the Oxford University Press.
52. From the *Listener*.
53. No record of previous publication.
54. From the *Listener*.
55. From the *Listener*.
56. From the *Times Literary Supplement*. Cf. *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism*, pp. 299-314.
57. From the *Listener*.
58. From the *Listener*.
59. Composite: partly from the *Spectator* and the *Listener*.
60. From the *Listener*.
61. From the *Times Literary Supplement*.
62. From the *Listener*.
63. From the *New English Weekly*.
64. From the *Listener*.
65. From *Purpose*.
66. From the *London Bulletin*.
67. No record of previous publication. The subject is treated at greater length in *Art and Industry* (Faber & Faber, 2nd ed., 1944).
68. From the *Spectator*, with additions.
69. From the *Listener*.
70. Speech at the Areopagitica Tercentenary Conference, 25 August, 1944.
71. From *Tribune*.

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